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June 29, 1897.

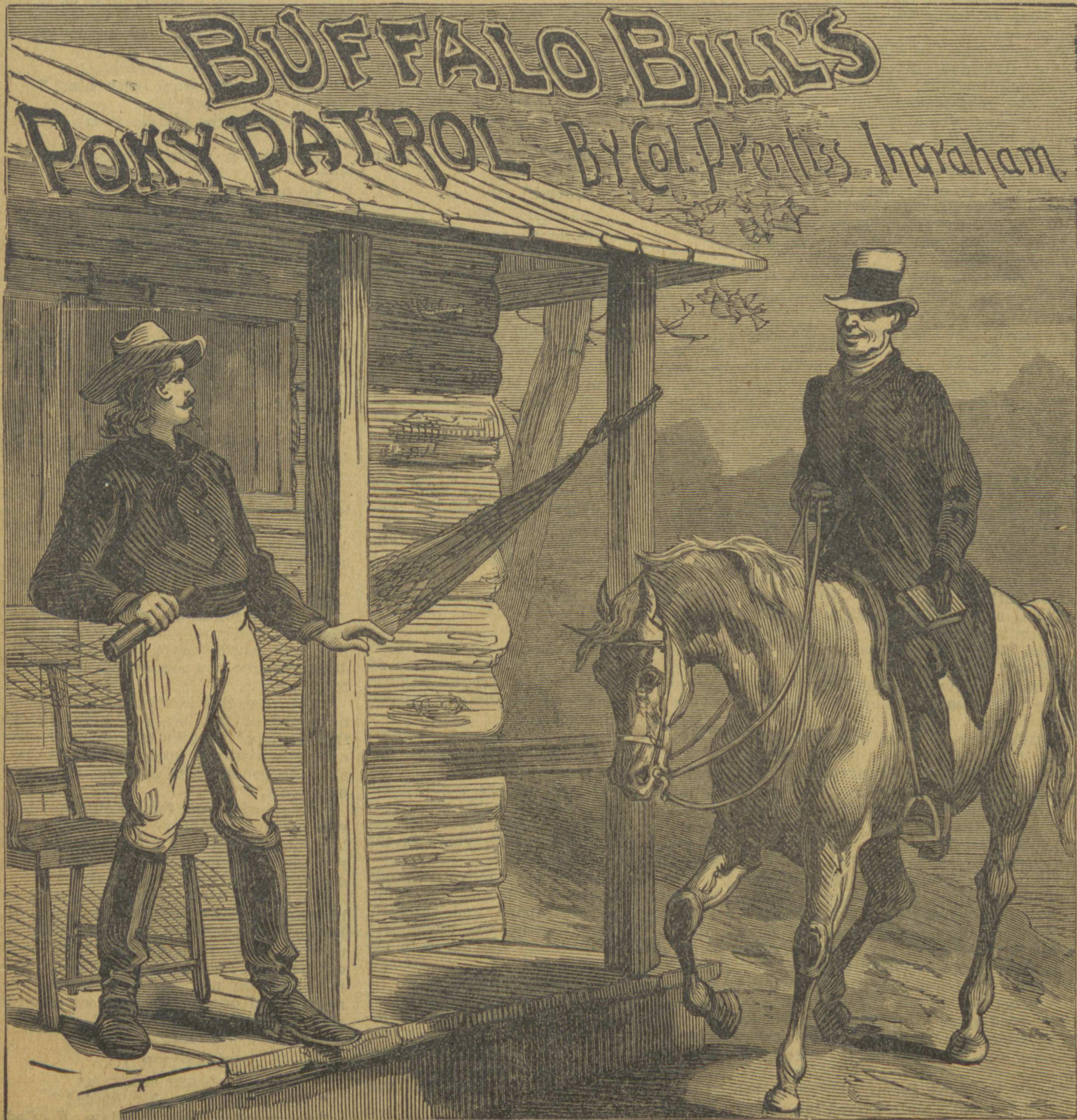
No. 1040.

Five Cents a Copy.
\$2.50 a Year.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Published Every
Tuesday.

Vol. XL.



"BY HEAVENS! BUT YOU ARE THE DEAD SHOT PARSON!" CRIED BUFFALO BILL.

Buffalo Bill's Pony Patrol;

OR,

The Mysterious Boy of the Overland.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTLAW'S DEMAND.

"Give up the boy, Mark Morell, or your life. Take your choice!" and the speaker enforced his demand by leveling a cocked revolver at the man before him.

This speaker was masked and armed. At his back stood four men, also masked and with revolvers drawn.

Behind them, a few paces off the trail, were half a dozen saddle horses.

The threatened man sat on the box of an Overland coach, for it was in the days when railroads had not yet crossed the continent.

This man was the beau ideal of the dashing Overland driver — handsome, fearless, and resolute. He had been halted by the road-agents, but instead of gold, they had demanded possession of a young passenger, a bright-faced boy of sixteen.

"This boy was put under my especial care, men, to take through in safety, or defend with my life," the driver had said boldly, when the five road-raiders had suddenly stepped out into the trail and held up the coach.

"We are here for the boy, and will take him," had been the threatening rejoinder.

Pale-faced, yet unflinching, the boy passenger had listened.

He was seated on the box with the driver, Mark Morell.

"What do you want with the boy, men, for gold is the game you generally hunt for?" asked Morell.

"The boy is the game we are after now. We well know that you have no gold along," returned the leader.

"Yes, you know too much. I only wish I could get the rope about the neck of one of your spies."

"But you can't. They are too smart for you and for every boss and driver of the Overland Trail."

"Come, boy, get down off that box!"

"I won't do it," was the plucky reply.

"Good for you, my boy!" said the driver, and then he asked quickly:

"How in Heaven's name did you cut-throats of the saddle know the boy was along?"

"That's none of your business, Mark Morell; but I will tell you that we know just as we do when you carry gold, and passengers with fat purses."

"Boy, did you hear me tell you to get down off of that box?"

"I heard you."

"Do you intend to obey?"

The boy, studying the face of the driver, asked in his frank way:

"Will they harm you if I don't?"

"No, lad, they don't dare kill Mark Morell, devils that they are, and devilish deeds that they have been guilty of."

"Then I will not obey you," was the lad's retort.

The road-agents laughed, amused at the bold stand taken by the brave boy.

"How can you prevent?" asked the leader.

"Shall we fight them, sir?" and the fearless boy once more looked into Mark Morell's face, dropping his hand upon the revolver in his belt.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Mark Morell smiled, but announced:

"They are a hard lot to fight, and outnumber us, lad. We will trade with them."

"We accept no terms, Mark Morell."

"See here, you know me, and my worst enemy will take my word."

"We do not dispute that."

"I am not rich, but I've got a thousand or so laid up, and if you'll let the boy go through, I'll bring the money to you on my next run through. I swear it, men!"

"Oh, sir, you are so kind; but I will pay you back, never fear, for I—"

Morell stopped the boy's speech quickly.

"You need not choke him off, Mark Morell, for we know he's rich."

"Do you accept my price?"

"No, and not ten nor twenty times as much would we accept. We know what we are doing."

"I've got a notion to fight you for the boy," savagely cried the plucky driver, and then the boy called:

"Just say the word, sir, and I am in it with you."

But, the weapons of the five were covering the driver, and sternly came the words:

"Give up the boy, Mark Morell, or your life!"

"Take your choice!"

CHAPTER II.

A BOY OF MYSTERY.

"It's a crying shame, an outrage, to force me to give up this boy into your coward hands," fiercely spoke Mark Morell, with a look as though he were tempted, in spite of all odds against him, to resist the demand.

"You are no fool, Mark Morell, so obey," warned the leader.

"Yes, I am a fool to drive on this trail and have to witness the misery, heartaches, and red deeds that I do."

"Is it so bad as all that?"

"Bad! You know that is a mild way to express it. You are one of the red-handed band that makes gold your god, and as long as you can get it, care nothing for human life nor for the suffering you cause."

"That is a lurid picture you paint, Mark."

"It is a true one."

"Why, I have seen an old man killed by your band in the very presence of his wife and daughter, simply because he sent his money around by sea, instead of trusting it overland."

"I saw his wife and daughter robbed of their jewels, and heard curses for their tears and agony."

"I have seen poor miners, going home with their hard-earned gold, robbed of their last dollar, and be forced to return to spend other weary years in the mines to get more."

"You have shot down men ruthlessly because they sought to defend their own; you have robbed women and children, and look at the drivers you have slain because they have had the nerve to defend their passengers."

"You have escaped, it seems."

"Yes, with half a dozen wounds that were intended to be fatal. I have escaped, as I do now, because I do not throw my life away when I can do not an atom of good by risking it. I have seen enough of your red work to know better."

"You are wise."

"I am a fool to remain here; but it

won't be for long, for my heart may some day run away with my head, and force me to do some act that will get me murdered."

"You are not a fool to remain, Mark Morell, for you know that you have hitherto won a passport through our hold-ups simply from your pluck."

"We have spared you, but we have not forgotten that you have called in the life chips of four of our band."

"We have not forgotten that you have prevented our getting hold of several fortunes, which but for your nerve and cleverness combined, we could have secured."

"No, the Overland Company value you very highly, and pay you well, for you have been the man to take most desperate chances; in fact, you are, as a driver, what Buffalo Bill is as a Pony Express rider, and we admire you, though we hate you, and fear you, for we don't know just what you intend to spring upon us in the way of a surprise."

"Stop all that talk and let me go on my way, for I am losing time."

"Then hand down that boy."

"What do you want with him?"

"That is our affair."

"It is mine, too, for he is my passenger."

"Then he is game we intend to entrap."

"He has nothing you can get."

"There we differ with you."

Turning to the boy, who was an intensely interested listener, as can be well imagined, Morell said:

"Do you know, young pard, what they want with you?"

"I do not, sir."

"Have you got any big money about you that they have found out, for they have spies on the trail at every station, and are determined to get from you—"

"I have only about fifty dollars, sir."

"Where are you going?"

The youth gave a quick glance at the driver, then at the outlaws, who still covered the latter with their guns.

Morell read in that he did not wish to tell, and said, quickly:

"It's none of my business, lad; I just wanted to know why the coward thieves here wanted you."

"Go a little slow with your epithets, Mark Morell," warned the leader.

"I choose my language to fit the occasion and call you what you are. Robbing and murdering is your trade, but I don't wonder you are ashamed of being told so."

"See here, this is all idle talk, and I'll no more of it. We are here to get that boy, and we take him, dead or alive, and you will die, too, if you make a show to protect him longer. It is business, now!"

"I'll go with you, for I would not have you murder my brave and noble friend here on account of a mere boy. I thank you, sir, but I'm not worth a row, if they do think so. Good-by, sir! and—"

The plucky boy had risen, and held out his hand to Mark Morell as he spoke; but, he paused suddenly, for his eyes fell upon a horseman a hundred yards back on the trail, and, as he gazed upon what the others did not see, there came a sharp report, and one of the outlaws dropped, shot through the head.

CHAPTER III.

ON SECRET SERVICE.

"You sent for me, Mr. Slade?"

The speaker was William F. Cody, then a Pony Express rider on the Over-

land Trail, and one who was winning fame in that capacity, as he later did as scout, guide, Indian fighter, and soldier.

Young, handsome, of superb physique, picturesque in appearance in his pony rider's costume, his long hair, sombrero, military cut moustache and imperial, he was every inch a man, and was just what his name implied:

"Buffalo Bill, the Prince of the Pony Riders."

His runs were the longest, yet made the quickest.

His trails were the roughest, yet he went over them at a flying pace.

They were beset with more dangers, haunted by desperate road-agents, yet he eluded all foes where he could, but fought them to the death when he was brought to bay.

Day and night he made his flying runs, and never had the Overland Company lost a dollar entrusted to his keeping.

So it was that he began to make fame for himself and history for the Overland Trail, around which a halo of romance, a weird mystery of those early days, will ever hang.

He had not long come in from a run, and was over in his cabin taking it easy, when a man from the station headquarters had come to him and told him that Alf Slade, the manager of that district of the Overland, wished to see him.

Alf Slade was a man who had been called a desperado.

Who he was or what his past had been few, if any, knew.

Possessed of an education, resembling a clergyman, with his clean-shaven face, he was content apparently with the wild life he led among wilder scenes and wilder men.

He had been the man selected by the Overland Company to command the worst part of the trail, and the wildest characters that haunted it, either for good or evil.

In spite of his reserved ways, he had made himself feared, respected, and admired.

His gun was ready when wanted, his aim as deadly as the best.

He read a man at sight, and had taken a fancy to Buffalo Bill the moment he saw him.

But he never showed a preference.

The man who did his duty soon found it out that Alf Slade was satisfied with him, as surely as did the one who shirked and attempted to have his own way.

Alf Slade was seated in his comfortable cabin when Buffalo Bill reported to him, as told to do.

"Sit down, Cody."

The handsome, dashing pony rider obeyed, wondering what was coming.

"I intend to lay you off for a while."

"Indeed, sir."

"Of what offense have I been guilty?" asked Buffalo Bill, his face flushing.

"Of none."

"I wish you for a special duty."

"I am ready, sir."

"It is about as dangerous a duty as I can put you on."

"Worse than pony riding, sir, on my run?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"Well, yes."

"All right, sir."

"You accept it?"

"I do, sir."

"Yet do not know what it is?"

"I don't care, so long as it is my duty, sir."

"Well said, Cody, and just what I expected of you."

"But you do not seem curious about what it is?"

"I have been so much with Indians, sir, I have learned to wait without impatience."

"I believe that is so, and the Indians set a good example that more of us should follow."

"But what I wish of you is to be a secret guard of the coaches for a while."

"Something valuable going through, sir?"

"Yes."

"I am ready, sir."

"Mind you, I wish it supposed here that you are off duty for a rest."

"Yes, sir."

"Not a soul must know what you are about."

"I understand, sir."

"The men all know that you are a devoted hunter between your rides, so you can be supposed to be off looking up game."

"But in reality guarding the coaches?"

"In one sense, yes."

"Does that mean that I am not to go with them, sir?"

"Exactly."

"A guard on a coach could be held up just as well as the driver."

"I see."

"I am to follow them."

"You are, or use your own discretion as to whether you will be ahead or behind them, for you will know best, as you understand thoroughly the favorite haunts of the road-agents."

"Yes, sir."

"What I wish is that you will be on hand when needed, and be able to rescue a coach, should it fall into the hands of the Pony Police, as these road-agents call themselves."

"I will do all that it is my power to do, Mr. Slade."

"I know that, Cody, and no one can ask more."

"When do I begin work, sir?"

"To-morrow."

"But now to let you into the secret," said Alf Slade, in a lower tone than he had before spoken in.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EAVESDROPPER'S FATE.

As he sat talking to his chief, Pony Rider Cody saw that he cast quick glances toward one corner of the cabin.

It was over toward the rear of the cabin, and glancing in that direction, the pony rider could see nothing to thus attract the gaze of the chief.

He knew that the men never dared go to the living cabin of Alf Slade unless sent for, and the "office" was some distance away.

The voice of Slade also had dropped to a whisper, for some reason.

Keen as were his ears, penetrating as were his eyes, Buffalo Bill could neither hear nor see anything to cause the great caution of his chief.

After a few sentences uttered in a whisper, Alf Slade said:

"I have had word from the superintendent that a valuable Express is to be sent through."

"It is jewelry, papers, and money belonging to a woman in San Francisco, and is too bulky and heavy for a pony rider to carry, so it is going through by coach."

"Yes, sir."

"The package is well disguised, and if seen by road-agents would never be suspected of possessing any value; but it is worth fifty thousand, I am informed, and the Overland Company has taken the risk, at a liberal price."

"I hope it will go through all right, sir."

"Yes, it must."

"To have it pass over my trail in safety is one reason I have taken you off pony riding duty for a while."

"I thank you, Mr. Slade, for your trust in me."

"You have to thank yourself for deserving it, otherwise I would not have placed the confidence I do in you."

"I remembered when you came to me years ago, as a boy, and dared ride Pony Express."

"We called you the Boy Pony Rider then, but you did a man's work."

"Now you have come back as a man, after making fame for yourself, and I find you as true as steel."

"I thank you, sir."

"But there is another reason for you to watch the coaches."

"Yes, sir."

"The superintendent writes me that there is a boy coming west about whom some mystery hangs."

"A boy, sir?"

"Yes, a lad of fifteen or sixteen, who is booked through to the end of my line."

"Where will he stop then, sir?"

"That is just it, where will he, unless he happens to be the son of one of my stock tenders and is going to join his father."

"That must be it, sir."

"Hardly, as the superintendent writes that he has just come on from Texas, and his way was paid through full first-class fare, and the boy given money for all extras and comforts."

"He can't be a stock tender's son, then, sir."

"Hardly."

"Then, again, the last driver on my run is to be instructed to allow the boy to leave the coach at any point along the line he may be pleased to do so, and also to answer all his questions and give him all the instructions he can about the country."

"A mysterious boy, sir, surely."

"Decidedly so, Cody."

"But can you guess why he wishes to be on the coach upon a wild trail?"

"No, sir, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"He may intend to join some one somewhere on the trail who may be waiting for him?"

"Who, for instance?"

"Might he not be some road-agent's kid?"

"Ah! I had not thought of that—but no, my instructions are that he shall be guarded from all chances of capture by road-agents."

"Then that does away with the kid of a road-agent idea, Chief Slade."

"Yes, Bill."

"Try again for a reason."

"Well, I can only suggest that he may be going to some gold hunters who have penetrated this country."

"And never have been heard from since?"

"True, sir, not directly, though they may have struck other parts of the line and communicated with their friends."

"That is so."

"I had not thought of that."

"And this boy may be going through to them, with instructions to leave the coach at a certain point, which he can find out by questioning the driver."

"I believe you are on the right trail, Cody, as you generally are."

"It's all guesswork, sir, but some of those parties of gold hunters may have

struck it rich, and in some way sent East for the boy."

"You are a good guesser."

"But the boy will come through on the same coach with that valuable package, and your duty will be to go on this secret duty at the eastern end of my line, and guard the coach with the boy to the westward end."

"I'll be there on the watch, sir; but will the drivers know?"

"Not a word," and suddenly drawing a revolver from his belt, Alf Slade fired over into the corner of the cabin.

A groan followed the shot, there was a glimmer of daylight through the corner of the cabin, and rising, Alf Slade said:

"It was an eavesdropper."

"He had his ear at that hole, and I knew it."

"But dead men tell no tales."

"Now come out and see who he is, though I think I can guess," and the two left the cabin together, passed around to the rear, and there lay a man, dead.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEBT OF A LIFE.

The bullet of Alf Slade had been unerringly aimed.

It had done the deadly work the Overland Boss had intended it should.

The man lay upon his face as he had fallen, and he was dead.

The bullet had entered his ear, as it was pressed hard against a little hole he had evidently cut between the logs of the cabin for the very purpose that had cost him his life.

"You know the man, Cody?" said Alf Slade, as he turned the body over.

"Oh, yes, sir, he is your clerk."

"I have suspected him before, and discovered that hole cut there two days ago, and a peg in it."

"When I sent him to tell you to come to my cabin he looked pleased."

"I watched him, saw that he went around the cabin, the light streamed in that hole, as he removed the peg, and I knew his ear was there."

"I told my story, and he heard it all; but I intended to kill him, and his tongue is silenced."

"Now to let the men know, and as he has a brother here, there may be trouble."

The boss took a large stage horn from where it hung at the headquarters cabin, and blew a number of startling, wild notes.

It was the signal for the men of the overland station, known as Slade's Ranch, to gather, and quickly.

With drivers, riders, hunters, storekeepers, stock tenders, and others employed, besides a number of hangers-on about such a place, there were all of a hundred men in the camps.

Within a few minutes all had gathered about the headquarters, wondering at the alarm.

Of course, every man came fully armed, for in that country a man would as soon go without his hat as his weapons.

Many had heard the dull report, fired within the cabin, and as shooting was not allowed within the camp, they suspected some trouble was on hand.

"Men, I called you together to state that I have just killed Professor Jim, as you called my clerk."

"I found him listening to what I had to say to one of my pony riders on a special duty, and I fired at the hole he had cut to put his ear to."

"I fired true, for he lies behind my cabin dead."

"I allow no man to pry into my affairs, and the one I catch doing so I shall kill."

"I have for some time known that there was a spy in this camp, and I set to work to find him."

"I did so, and his spying is ended."

The men were silent, and just then a man came briskly up to the spot.

"Lute, ther boss has kilt Professor Jim, your brother," called out an evil-faced man who, sorry that he had missed seeing the eavesdropper shot, wished to see more trouble.

"Killed my brother?" shouted the man who had just entered the crowd.

"Yes," said a number of voices.

"Is Jim dead?"

"He is."

"And who did you say killed him?" asked the man, seemingly not fully comprehending the situation, though he was moving the while nearer to Alf Slade.

"The boss kilt him," announced the man who was anxious for more trouble.

"Yes, Lute, as I have just told the men, I—"

But the man had been playing a part.

He only wished to get near to Alf Slade to catch him off his guard, a thing not a man had yet been able to do, though it had often been tried on.

There had been method in his seemingly not comprehending what had been told him.

Both he and his brother, Professor Jim, were above the average men in intelligence, and, employed as stable boss, Lute Ross had been anxious to step into Alf Slade's shoes.

He felt that he could afford to wait, for sooner or later some man would kill Alf Slade, and he was next in power, so would assume charge.

His brother, Professor Jim, was in a position to know the inside trail, as clerk, and the two could make their places pay them well.

But here had Alf Slade killed his brother.

It was for him to act, promptly and with decision.

He would have the sympathy of the men in avenging his brother.

Getting to the position he wanted, and quick as a flash, he leveled his revolver full at Alf Slade's head.

Lute Ross was known as a dead shot, and a terror when on the warpath.

Now his manner had deceived all save one.

Slade had expected trouble with him, but he now had been caught off his guard.

The revolver had been drawn so slyly, leveled so quickly, that he stood in the presence of instant death before he had a chance to move.

"I'll avenge my brother, Alf Slade, by killing you!"

The words were uttered quickly, and viciously, but Alf Slade did not flinch.

Another second and the finger of Lute Ross would have pulled trigger.

But, the one who had suspected him of treachery was before him; his revolver cracked, and the weapon of Lute Ross fell from his shattered hand.

Alf Slade's life was saved.

CHAPTER VI.

MASKED TREACHERY.

"Who fired that shot?"

There was no reply, but a moment after all saw Buffalo Bill standing, revolver in hand, looking at Lute Ross, who was grasping his wounded right hand with his left.

"Don't shoot again, Bill, for you've got the game," said Lute Ross, and he added:

"I know when I'm beaten."

"It's a game I did not care to play; but you forced me to it, as I saw that you had your weapon drawn and intended to kill the chief without knowing whether he or your brother was to blame."

"I was wrong, Bill."

"Chief Slade, I beg your pardon for attempting to kill you; but Jim was all I had, he was my brother, and naturally I was maddened at his death."

"Poor fellow, he wronged you in some way, I fear."

"He was a traitor, Ross, and catching him in dirty work, I killed him."

"Come, let Doc Norris look at your hand, for it is bleeding freely," said Alf Slade, kindly.

Doc Norris, a young surgeon, was already preparing to dress the wounded hand, but Lute Ross said in a choking voice:

"Let me see my dead brother; never mind me."

"Don't be a fool, Lute, for he's dead; I just left him, and you may bleed to death."

"Come to the creek where I can get water," said Doc Norris.

"One minute, doc," and turning to Buffalo Bill, Lute Ross called out:

"No hard feelings, Bill."

"You did right to save the chief's life, but you took big chances in that crowd, for you might have killed an innocent man, and that would have made trouble for you."

"I knew just what I was doing, Lute Ross."

"I fired at your hand, and knew my bullet would go where I sent it."

"You intended to kill the boss; I was determined you should not, and that is all there is to it," and Buffalo Bill turned on his heel and walked off to his cabin.

An hour after Alf Slade came there, and, holding out his hand, said:

"I owe you my life, Cody."

"That was a beautiful shot, indeed."

"I shall never forget it, or you."

"I saw that he suspected what had happened when he came up."

"He was looking everywhere for his brother, and he slipped his revolver up his sleeve, to have it ready."

"You saw this?"

"Yes, sir, and his dazed manner was all assumed."

"He meant to kill you, chief."

"Do you think he knew of his brother's being a spy?"

"Of course he did."

"The two were in the game together, to get all they could out of it, sir, and my idea is that he simply pretended to forgive you, and will be a snake in the grass."

"I believe you are right, now you suggest it to me, Bill."

"Why, I never suspected Professor Jim until I knew he sent letters ahead on the trails, and trouble quickly followed."

"Then I watched him, and—well, he's dead, and I suppose I will have to kill his brother next."

"Or he will kill you, sir."

"For a while, until his hand is all right, he'll play fair; but then look out."

"I will."

"You are young, Cody, but you read men thoroughly."

"Now, do you understand all that I expect of you?"

"I think so, sir."

"And will start in time so as to be

on the trail close to the coach on its run through?"

"Yes, sir, and try and guard that valuable package and see just what that boy is after."

"That is just it."

"You will have to flank this station, you know, to keep from being seen following the coach."

"I will, sir."

"You know, I intend to have the same driver run the full length of my trail, for it is Mark Morell."

"The best man on the Overland, sir, and we are good pards."

"Yes, there is no better driver or all-around man in the company's employ."

"I have as much faith in him as I have in you, and that is saying a great deal."

"Thank you, sir."

"But did you learn the name of this boy you say is coming through?"

"He is down as Harry Harman, a youth of sixteen."

"And he comes through on the same coach with the value package?"

"Yes."

"And Mark Morell is to drive the whole run?"

"Yes."

"I shall so send word on the next east-bound coach."

"Will you please hint to Mark Morell, sir, that if he is held up to try and delay the road-agents as long as he can?"

"Why so?"

"It will give me more time for action, sir."

"That is so."

"Being alone, I will wish to do what I have to in a way that will assure success, as I may have big odds against me, and a long hold-up will give me a chance to act."

"Do you wish aid, Cody?"

"No, sir."

"You can pick out a couple of men, if you wish, to accompany you."

"I prefer to go alone, sir. It is safer, for one hardly knows who is a friend or foe out here," was the answer.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PONY RIDER SHADOWER.

Since the treachery of Professor Jim, the trusted clerk of Alf Slade, and the feeling shown by his brother, Lute Ross, Buffalo Bill felt that he must be very careful as to who was to be allowed to hold a secret.

He had read Lute Ross, he thought, correctly, that it was not so much grief over his brother's death as disappointment at losing the position he had held.

"If that man was not in the deal with Professor Jim, I am greatly mistaken," was the comment of Pony Rider Cody.

He then went on to argue that Lute Ross had hidden his real feelings that he would be able to remain at the camps.

A quarrel would have thrown him out, unless he could have killed the chief, and this Buffalo Bill had prevented him from doing.

He therefore decided to hide all idea of revenge and hatred, to play his cards skillfully.

The more he talked with Alf Slade upon this subject, the more the latter felt that Bill Cody was right.

"He'll apply for the clerkship, sir, for you know he writes a good hand and is as well educated as his brother was."

"Yes, Cody, but you stopped his work for some time, as that wound was no slight one. Doc Norris told me one of the bones was splintered."

"Do you not know, chief, that Lute Ross uses one hand as well as he does the other?"

"I believe I have heard this."

"He writes with both hands, and shoots as well with his left as with his right."

"You recall to me what I now remember to have heard."

"I was expecting him to draw with his left, when I wounded his right, and so was ready to clip that also."

"It is fortunate for him that he did not do it."

"Well, I shall be surprised, sir, if he applies to you to go into the office to replace his brother."

"If he does, it will be proof beyond doubt of treachery, for he would not bury the hatchet except for harm to me."

"Take Pony Bob, sir, for he writes a good hand, and I can vouch for him."

"I will do so, speaking to him at once; but I wish to give Lute Ross the chance to apply, and that will make me sure of him."

Then, with a grasp of the hand in farewell, Alf Slade left Buffalo Bill to prepare for his trail, to start out as a shadower of the stage coach.

Not wishing to be seen at any of the stations, intending to flank them all, Buffalo Bill prepared to go well supplied for camping, and to take his best horse for rapid riding and endurance.

He also took his rapid-fire carbine and made every arrangement for hot and deadly work.

This done, he went out among the cabins, to purposely let the men know that the chief had given him a leave and he intended to go on a hunt, as he always did when he got a chance.

He stopped at the cabin of Pony Bob, an old pard of his, and quietly said:

"Bob, the chief will want you, I guess, and if he wishes to take you off your rides don't kick."

"What's up, Bill?" asked the rider, who got his name from the double reason that he was a very small man in stature, though a giant in pluck and endurance, and always rode the smallest horses in his rides.

"I can tell you nothing, Pony Bob, only keep your eyes open."

"I'll do it, for I go on what you say every time, Buffalo Bill."

"And right now I wish to tell you to keep your eyes open, for Lute Ross seems almost glad his brother is dead, and you prevented him from killing the chief, in his desire to show that Alf Slade did right and you also."

"He is really grateful to you."

"Yes, and that means watch out for snakes in the grass."

"Just so."

"Be on your guard, and I shall warn the chief."

"Do so, Bob, and tell him what you told me."

"Now I am off for a hunt."

"That means plenty of game for the boys."

"I only wish I was with you."

Buffalo Bill expressed the same wish, but added:

"You can do better work here just now, Bob."

"But keep a good watch, for things are not going just right now."

Returning to his cabin, Buffalo Bill mounted his own horse, and with a couple of pack animals in lead, rode out of the camps.

"Buffalo Bill must expect to kill game galore, to take two horses along," said a

stage driver, who with others saw him depart.

"He'll get game, you bet, for he never fails," responded another.

But the Pony Rider Shadower had a motive in taking two pack horses along other than to get game, and they were two animals that he had under perfect training.

A dozen miles from the ranch Buffalo Bill went into camp for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOUNTED FERRET.

Buffalo Bill killed a deer before he went into camp, and so, with the provisions he had brought, had a very substantial supper.

He would have enjoyed company, but had become so accustomed to his solitary life when on the trail that no sense of loneliness ever oppressed him.

Ever anxious for his horses' comfort, he always sought a good camping place, where water and grass were the best. In this instance he had found all these, so both master and steed greatly enjoyed the rest.

Having plenty of time, he remained in camp for a late breakfast the next morning; then he made his way leisurely to the point on the Overland Trail where he intended to head off the coach.

Not to head it off, exactly, but to lie in wait, and have a look at Monk Morell as he went by, as well as to see who were his passengers.

Reaching the trail much in advance of the stage's coming, he staked his horses, got out his line, and caught a good supply of fish for dinner from the brook.

The meal over, he took his way to a cliff around which the stage trail ran, a quarter of a mile from his camp.

Fifty yards from the cliff was a stream where the drivers always halted to water their teams. This halt would permit the Pony Rider Ferret to carefully observe who were in the coach.

Safely hidden in the cedars on the cliff, the pony rider patiently waited the coming of the coach.

He knew well that no attempt would be made to halt the vehicle between where he then was and the station a few miles distant, if Monk Morell held the reins.

At that station on the line of Alf Slade as boss began, and if Monk Morell was to drive the whole distance, then, instead of changing at Slade's Ranch, where another driver usually relieved him, he would continue on for the full run of two hundred miles.

This would be to Monk a big duty, but he was just the man for such a task.

Where on Slade's line the road-agents would hold up the coach Buffalo Bill had no idea. He well knew it was the most dangerous section of the whole trail. At a number of places the outlaws had done red and lawless work, and many graves dotted the trail here and there, attesting to the peril of the passage.

Along this trail, too, the pony riders had been made to suffer, and often in his rapid flights had Buffalo Bill paused to lift his hat at the grave of a dead comrade, and to wonder how long before he should share the same fate.

There were spots, also, where he himself had made graves, when held up by the outlaws, and thus it was the whole trail was marked for him with sad and cruel memories.

Right from that very cliff, where he then was in hiding, he looked down upon the green mound which marked the last resting place of an outlaw whom he had

sent across the River of Death into the Great Beyond.

If Monk Morell drove the whole run, it was only what Buffalo Bill had ridden over a number of occasions, and the dauntless driver would no more shirk his duty than would the Pony Rider Ferret.

He had not been long in his hiding place before his ears caught the heavy rumble and crashing of wheels, and soon the stage came in sight, half a mile away.

Two persons were on the box. If others were inside, the watcher on the cliff could not tell.

The driver he at once recognized as Monk Morell, the Driver Prince of the Overland.

The person by his side was shorter and more slender, and the face was beardless.

"It is the boy," decided Buffalo Bill.

The coach drew rein at the creek for the teams to drink, and the shadower had a good view of those on the box.

"That's a handsome boy, with a strong face. He is the sole passenger. There are no others in the coach," he said to himself.

He heard the driver and the boy talking together, decided that Morell had "taken to" his young passenger, and having seen the coach go by within thirty feet of him, he rapidly made his retreat to his camp, mounted, and soon was in rapid pursuit to keep up within hearing distance, but no nearer.

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE BREWING.

At the proper pace Buffalo Bill kept on steadily, half a mile behind the coach, flanking the relay stations, every fifteen to twenty miles apart, where the coaches and pony riders changed horses, for he did not care to be seen by the stock tenders there.

Drawing near the main station, Slade's Ranch, Buffalo Bill made a wide detour, rode rapidly, came out some miles beyond, and halted for supper.

Night had fallen, and his halt for supper gave his horses a good rest.

The meal and rest over, he saddled up and took his position to follow once more.

He saw the coach go by, heard the voice of the boy passenger talking to the driver, and the voice of the latter in reply told him that Monk was still on the box; so he had not changed at Slade's Ranch, and was going to run the coach clear through.

That Morell had been told by Alf Slade that Buffalo Bill was shadowing him the latter felt confident, and he was sure that the driver knew of the value of the package he carried, as also that the boy was to be particularly guarded.

When the coach had gone by Buffalo Bill went for his horses and was again following.

The road-agents, or "Pony Police," as they liked to be known, might attack the coach in the night; but they usually preferred daylight for their work, when they could see the better to rob or discover who was along.

On through the night, at a slow pace, went the coach, stopping at the relay stations, and as steadily followed the Pony Rider Ferret, avoiding, as before, each station.

At daybreak he came to where the trail crossed a stream, and beyond was an open plain for a dozen miles.

Here he halted, for on that plain he knew the coach was safe.

The horses were staked out to feed and rest, and the pony rider cooked for himself a good breakfast.

A rest of an hour and a half; then he mounted and went on after the coach, as soon as he saw it enter the hills beyond the plain.

It was rapid riding, but he at length heard the rumble of the wheels, so knew the coach was still safe.

Forty miles more and the end of "Slade's Line" would be reached, and there Monk Morell's duty ended, as well as the work of the pony rider as shadower.

There another division boss than Slade would be responsible for the value package and the boy passenger.

But, was the boy passenger to go beyond the run of Monk Morell?

"That coach will be held up before it reaches the end of Monk Morell's run.

"If they know about the package and the boy, the Outlaw Pony Police mean to get both together.

"I know you are feeling the pull on you, good horses, but we may be wanted soon, so must keep close at hand," and with this the rider drew a little nearer to the coach.

More miles were cast behind, and the shadower kept just within the sound of the wheels; he did not care to be too close.

"There is a dandy place ahead for a hold-up, just where Driver Rigly was killed, and the outlaws have a good chance for escape, as well as to defend their retreat, so I would not be surprised if Monk was halted there, so I must be prepared," and Buffalo Bill was doubly alert to catch the rumble of wheels.

The spot which the pony rider remembered as one that had been fatal to Driver Rigly, who had attempted to resist a hold-up, was just ahead, and Buffalo Bill became keenly anxious.

Suddenly he halted; he had heard a voice ahead!

"They are there, and the trouble has come! Now, brave Morell, I am with you!"

With this the shadower turned to his pack horses, untied the lead lines, and said:

"Now remain right here until you hear my call; then come a rushing, for when I want you, I'll want you bad."

The faithful and well-trained animals remained just where he placed them, while he rode on ahead, to where he knew Monk Morell was in trouble.

CHAPTER X.

THE PONY RIDER'S SUPERB WORK.

The place selected by the Outlaw Police was a good one for their work.

They were in position when the coach drove up, but were not seen until the leader of the party of five stepped out and halted the driver by a rifle leveled at his head.

What followed has been related in our opening chapter—how the daring Driver Prince of the Overland boldly defied the outlaws, and yet, in the end, had to yield, to give up his mysterious boy passenger, or lose his life.

But there was one near at hand whom the Outlaw Police little expected.

Buffalo Bill had advanced to a pine thicket, in which he was securely sheltered. He had ridden up to a large boulder, over which he peered, and, rifle in hand, he sat in his saddle watching events as they happened.

Just too far off to catch all that was

said, he was yet near enough to learn that the mysterious boy passenger was the bone of contention.

He had even caught the words of the leader of the Outlaw Pony Police, that he knew the coach carried no gold on that run, but the boy was their game, and him they would have.

"Monk Morell is having a hard time of it, and one of those fools may fire on him, so I guess it's time for me to chip in," reasoned Buffalo Bill.

There were five of the outlaws, and others might be within call.

But, the pony rider was not to count odds. The boy must be saved, and now was time to act.

Out from the covert Buffalo Bill rode, into full sight from the trail, but the outlaws were too busy with their lawless work to notice him.

Raising his rifle, his keen eye glanced along the sights, his finger touched trigger, the report followed, and the outlaw at whom he aimed dropped dead.

At the shot came a cry of alarm, and the outlaws sprang for cover, but the leader shouted:

"Move, and you are a dead man, Monk Morell!"

"I'm not going. Don't have to, now the pony boys have chipped in," was the cool reply, while the brave boy passenger waved his hat around his head and gave a cheer.

"Stand firm, men! It is only Pony Rider Bill Cody on his run. We can down him!" shouted the chief.

But, as he spoke, "Pony Rider Bill Cody" gave a yell and shouted:

"Come, pard! Now for them, Pony Riders of the Overland!"

There was no mistaking the sound, for certainly hoofs were heard dashing up the stony trail.

The outlaws knew that at times the Pony Riders' Patrol were driven to turning out against them.

When they did they never showed mercy. The patrol must now be guarding the coach, to protect it from the Pony Police.

They heard the hoof strokes coming nearer, as if several of the patrol were at Cody's call.

They dared not wait longer, and yet the bold outlaw leader, as he sprang upon his horse, leveled his revolver at the boy passenger and commanded:

"Get down, boy, and come with me, or I will kill you!"

"I won't do it!"

The leader raised his revolver, but Buffalo Bill was charging at a run now, and a bullet from his carbine tore through the outlaw's arm, knocking the weapon from his grasp.

Others were surely following the daring pony rider. The outlaws were gone, yet were calling to their leader to follow, and he wheeled to do so.

As he wheeled he grasped a second revolver in his left hand.

Monk Morell, now on guard, intended to fire, but, ere he could do so, the boy had leveled his revolver, pulled trigger, and the weapon fell from the outlaw chief's left hand, as it had from his right.

The boy's bullet had cut through the bandit's arm!

"I didn't wish to kill him," he explained to the amazed Morell, and added:

"I have my reasons."

Away sped the outlaw leader's horse, unchecked by the reins, as the rider's arms hung by his sides.

At that juncture, Buffalo Bill dashed up, and coming along the trail were his two pack horses.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASK REMOVED.

"Catch those horses, Monk, while I give those fellows a scare," cried Buffalo Bill, as he dashed up to the coach.

"All right, Glorious Bill Cody, but take no big risks," called out Morell, as the pony rider sped on.

Suddenly they heard his rifle crack, then another shot and another, followed by shouts of command in different voices.

"Why, the outlaws are coming back! Let us fight them!" cried the boy passenger.

"No; they are on the jump as fast as they can go, little pard. That is Buffalo Bill playing it on them, and I'll bet they think a dozen crack-shots are after them."

"Buffalo Bill?" repeated the youth, in surprise.

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"That was Buffalo Bill who saved you from capture."

"That splendid-looking young man?"

"Just so!"

"I have read of him since I was a little chap."

"That is the very man."

"He began life in Kansas as an Indian fighter at ten years of age."

"Yes, and has been making a name for himself ever since."

"Oh, how glad I am! I never expected to see that famous borderman."

"Well, you have seen him, and he'll be back soon, when you can talk to him."

"He saved me."

"He certainly did, for those scoundrels were determined to have you. Will you tell me why?"

"Well, some day I may tell you—not now."

"You know, then?"

"I can guess."

Monk Morell was wondering more and more about his strange passenger, and becoming more deeply interested in him.

"I wish to thank Buffalo Bill for all he did for me," and the driver thought that the boy shuddered at some thought that flashed through his mind.

"Say, young pard, where did you learn to shoot?" suddenly asked Morell.

"In Texas, sir."

"You handle a revolver like an expert."

"I've had considerable practice, sir. I was born and reared on a ranch, in a wild country, and you know we have some rough and tough men in Texas, too."

"I will not deny the fact," answered the driver, smiling.

Then he leaped from the box and caught the two pack horses, that had already halted by the coach.

"Hitch them, lad, while I take a look under this outlaw's mask."

The boy obeyed, and then came and stood by Morell's side.

Monk had taken the mask from the dead outlaw's face, upon which he was gazing with amazement.

"Do you know him, sir?"

"Indeed I do! He is an extra pony rider at Slade's Ranch, and is supposed to be off on leave. He is a great friend of the man the chief shot, and who was known as Professor Jim."

"Yes, I heard the chief tell you about it."

"Well, it will be a surprise to Buffalo Bill, I can tell you, to know that Pony Rider Allen Long has become an outlaw."

"I tell you, boy, the greed for gold in

men makes it difficult to know who to trust out here."

"Yes, sir, it does," returned the boy, so earnestly that Monk Morell gazed at him and said:

"You seem to know."

"I do, sir," was the quiet reply.

A moment after the sound of hoofs was heard, and Morell hastily covered up the face of the dead outlaw, just as Buffalo Bill rode up, calling out as he threw himself from his saddle:

"They have gone for good, Monk, but as there were only five of them, I am sure the larger part of the band are on ahead, to hold you up."

"I believe you, Pard Cody; but I wish to introduce to you my boy pard, Harry Harmon, who has read of you and wishes to thank you for your service to him, for those fellows were determined to have him."

"Indeed, I do wish to thank you, sir, and I am proud to know you," said the youth, earnestly.

The pony rider shook the boy's hand warmly, as he said:

"I was sent on the trail to save you from capture, and I am glad to have done so; but, did you not break the left arm of that outlaw leader?"

"Yes, sir, you knocked his revolver out of his right hand, so I followed suit, playing for the left bower."

The pony rider and the driver smiled at the way the boy put it, the former remarking:

"You'll get along, boy pard, either in the Wild West or Tame East."

"Now, Monk, to take a look at that man and see who he is."

"I know; but you cannot guess."

Buffalo Bill strode rapidly to the body, removed the mask, and fairly shouted:

"My pard, Allen Long!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE PONY RIDER'S RUSE.

They had been good friends in the Pony Riders' Camp, Buffalo Bill and Allen Long, yet the man he had killed now was proven to be one of the Outlaw Police! The revelation was a severe shock.

"Monk, we were good friends, Allen Long and I, and once he saved my life, and that made him my pard. Now I have taken his. I only wish that I had aimed at some other one of the band."

"It is best as it is, Bill, for you might have yet trusted him to your sorrow."

"He was a great friend of Professor Jim's, also."

"Yes, and this shows why. You saw the chief, of course?"

"Oh, yes, and knew you were somewhere near; but I did not believe you would dare attack such odds."

"Well, you see, I have my two well-trained horses here to help me out."

"Yes; but I really thought you had other pony riders near."

"The Pony Police made a dead set, Bill, to get this boy."

"Does he know why?"

"Yes, but does not care to tell."

"Well, Monk, you know that you have a high-value package along?"

"I do."

"But the Pony Police do not suspect it?"

"Nary suspect. It is in a rough bundle," and the driver pointed to an old carpet-bag on the top of the coach.

"It contains some miners' tools and a few old things, and has a tag on it addressed to a man in the mines."

"But the valuables?"

"Are in the false bottom of the old bag. It was a woman's idea, Bill, but a mighty good one."

"It was that," and then, glancing at the boy, who was closely examining the pony rider's horses, with the eye of a keen judge of horseflesh, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Monk, I have an idea."

"Name it, William the Gallant!"

"There were five outlaws here?"

"Yes, just that many."

"That was not their real leader who led them here."

"Who then?"

"An under officer."

"Well?"

"The band numbers, as you know, about fifteen."

"True; more than a baker's dozen."

"They knew of this boy's coming, and that they want him bad you have good evidence."

"That is Testament truth."

"They have, therefore, divided their force in three gangs, or two, at least. How does that strike you, Monk?"

"I believe you are right, Cody."

"The boy is supposed to leave you somewhere on your run?"

"So Chief Slade told me."

"You have only about thirty miles further, so his leaving point is within that distance?"

"Just so, William."

"Then, what's down in the outlaw program? Why, I bet you will be held up again within the next twenty miles!"

"Good reasoning, Bill. I think so, too."

"You will carry along the body of Allen?"

"Yes, to the end of my run, to be buried there, unless the outlaws wish to rob me of him, and I'll raise no objection to that same."

"If they hold you up, they will take the boy, and if their chief, Goldgrip, is there—and he will be, I am sure—why, that carpet-bag will be explored very quickly, for he is up to all dodges of that kind."

"He is, indeed."

"Now, my idea is to take the boy and the carpet-bag with me, leave the trail, flank the road-agents, and make for the end of the run, to meet you there."

"A good idea, Bill, but—"

"Well?"

"Suppose the boy wishes to leave, as it is said he is booked to do, before getting to the end of my run?"

"He can leave me as well as he can leave you, and I will know something about this strange move on his part."

"You are right, and it will be well to find out."

"Yes, for there is some mystery in a boy's being set down alone on an Overland Trail, as I understand it is his intention to be."

"There is, indeed, but he is as close-mouthed as a clam about himself, though a mighty bright and entertaining boy on all other subjects."

"Well, I'll not delay you, but arrange the pack saddle so that he can ride on it with comfort, and your hard-looking old carpet-bag can go on the other horse."

"All right, Pard Bill. You come from Chief Slade, and I will do just as you wish; but, let me tell you that the boy got a letter at Slade's Ranch."

"Did he? That is news."

"Yes, it came from the westward, on the coach I met there. The chief handed it to him as we were driving off."

"Did he tell you anything about it?"

"Not a word. He quietly read it, then put it in his pocket, making no comment."

"Strange."

"Oh, he is a deep one, is that boy."

"Did you ask him about it?"

"I hinted, but he just pretended he didn't understand what I was driving at."

"Monk, we must solve the mystery about that boy."

"Yes, if only to satisfy our curiosity," replied Morell.

The new plan was told to the boy, then standing some distance away, purposefully, so as not to interfere with the conference. He was quite willing to go with Buffalo Bill, so his luggage was packed upon one of the horses, with the valuable carpet-bag; he mounted the other, and the dead outlaw having been put in the coach, with farewells to Monk Morell the pony rider and his mysterious young companion mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER XIII.

AS WAS PROPHESIED.

Monk Morell drove on his way meditating upon all that had occurred.

He could but feel that Buffalo Bill had acted right in taking the youth and the big-value package along with him, for he felt morally certain that the coach would be held up again, as Cody had reasoned.

"Captain Goldgrip," as the leader of the Outlaw Pony Police was called, never did things by halves.

A stage had been known to run the gantlet of no less than two different detachments of the outlaw band; yet, in the end, to fall into Goldgrip's own grip.

But Monk Morell went right ahead, as if his trail was a clear and perfectly safe one—his thoughts turning to his mysterious passenger rather than to the hold-up which was in store, not many miles ahead.

"If any one can get out of him his secret, Buffalo Bill can," mused the driver.

As Buffalo Bill had chased the four outlaws down a canyon that would necessitate a long ride for the squad to get around in front again, and so inform others of what had happened, Monk Morell therefore determined to drive so rapidly as to head them off.

On he went at double the schedule time, and when he reached the first relay the stock tender was urged to hurry the fresh team up, explaining that he might be followed by road-agents with whom he had had a brush.

The tender did hurry, and then began to look out for the outlaws in pursuit of the coach.

About half a dozen miles beyond this relay Morell came to a valley. It was more of a basin, and surrounded by mountains, through which there were numerous passes.

Into the valley and out of it, through two of these passes, the stage trail ran, while a number of other trails crossed the basin, with ingress and egress by way of the other breaks in the range encircling the depression.

Morell halted his horses for water, at a small stream in the middle of the valley, and, as was his wont, gazed about him upon the beautiful and impressive scenery—

"The Mighty Hills that God bespoke."

He had just started his team on their way out of the stream when he saw half a dozen horsemen ride into the trail ahead.

Glancing behind, he beheld four other horsemen following.

"Buffalo Bill was right. That is Goldgrip himself and the rest of his band. I am in for it now. But it was an inspiration in Pard Bill to take the boy and that bag."

Monk betrayed no excitement, and drove along to meet the deadly foes of the Overland Trail.

As he drew near he saw there were five of the horsemen. One was in advance of the others, and all had halted across the trail.

A glance in the rear disclosed the four behind him, coming at a canter.

"How are you, Captain Goldgrip?" and Morell drew rein before he got the order to halt.

All the horsemen were masked. They were well mounted, on the hardy mountain ponies of that country, which had the endurance of hounds, and could climb like mountain sheep.

The men were dressed in a kind of uniform, to carry out their idea of Pony Police.

The leader held a revolver in his hand, while each of his men had their rifles ready.

"It is for me to ask how you are, Monk Morell, for I fatten on the gold I get from you, and you languish on the small pay of an Overland stage driver," said the leader.

"Yes, and I would rather starve as an honest man than live in luxury as a thief and murderer."

"Oh, that is only a difference of tastes, Monk. You were born honest, as I was; but our paths in life led us on different trails, and circumstances did the rest by us."

"There is no need of a man being a thief or worse unless he wishes to become an outcast."

"An opinion only. But, I did not halt you to preach a sermon to us, or call us bad names."

"Well, what do you wish, Goldgrip?"

"I want a boy passenger you carry, and a bag of valuables, or, in their stead, I want your life," was the menacing rejoinder.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PONY POLICE AT WORK.

Monk Morell did not flinch under this menace; he simply smiled as he retorted:

"Well, you will have to take my life, Goldgrip, for I have not got the goods you are after."

The masked leader started at this announcement, at the same time making a threatening gesture with his revolver.

His men had now all advanced, and Morell was surrounded at the odds of nine to one.

"What do you mean?" demanded Goldgrip, savagely.

"Mean? Why, just what I say."

"Have you no passengers in that coach?"

The outlaw chief evidently feared a surprise, as had been the case only too often for his own comfort.

"Only one, Goldgrip."

"The boy, yo' mean?"

"No; a man."

"It's a lie. You had a boy as passenger when you began your run. Where is he?"

"Oh, he's grown to be a man now, Goldgrip," was the taunting answer of the irritating driver.

"Just look in and see," he suggested.

The chief now was still more fearful of a trap, and said:

"Men, cover him with your rifles, and if I am fired on riddle him with bullets."

"Yes, sir," from every man, with rifle ready.

But, Monk did not weaken. He again suggested.

"Take a look into the hearse, Goldgrip, for hearse it is."

"One minute. Were you halted back on the trail?"

"Certainly I was! That was your programmc, and it was carried out. Just as you ordered, five of your gang of cut-throats held me up."

"They got the boy?"

"Not much they didn't!" and Monk gave a quizzical wink with one eye.

"You started on your run with the boy?"

"Yes, and a jolly young chap he was."

"Did he get off?" asked the outlaw, betraying further surprise, if not alarm.

"Well, he was taken off."

"By my men?"

"Not much by your men!"

"Who then?"

"By the Pony Riders' Patrol."

"Ha! What does this mean?"

"Mean? Why that they were too sharp for you, Goldgrip. That's what!"

"It is a lie! Th Pony Riders' Patrol were not out on this trail."

"You don't know everything, Goldgrip, though your spies do keep you pretty well posted, I admit."

"What do you know, Monk Morell?"

"Just what I told you."

"That the Pony Riders' Patrol are out and took your boy passenger?"

"Yes, and that was not all."

"What else?"

"You had not posted your five fellow-cutthroats about a bag of valuables, fearing they might skip off with it."

"Ah!"

"But the patrol knew about it, and took it back with the boy."

"Where did they take them?"

"Chief Slade sent for the boy and the bag."

"Have you proof of this?"

Goldgrip almost shouted the question, in his excitement and anger.

"Yes, proof enough to convince any coroner's jury. Just look into the coach, Goldgrip!"

"What is there?"

"Look and see."

"What is there, I asked you? I'll stand no trifling, though I do not wish to kill a brave man, as I know you to be, Monk Morell."

"A dead man is there. See for yourself."

Still Goldgrip hesitated.

"Who is he?" he demanded.

"One of your men whom we knew at Slade's Ranch as Allen Long, and had never suspected of being of your kind."

"My God!" and the outlaw leader spurred up alongside of the coach and peered into the window.

He beheld the body of the dead outlaw lying back upon the rear seat.

Hastily he leaned in, and tore the mask from the dead man's face.

"You have told the truth, Morell. It is Allen Long, my—"

He paused, but Monk finished the sentence for him:

"Your spy at Slade's Ranch?"

"He was not one of my men, but I knew him well," the chief declared, as though fearing to say more.

"He was with your men and masked."

"Who killed him?"

"The Pony Patrol when they found your gang at their dirty work."

"No one else?"

"One other man was wounded, the one who acted as leader."

"Was he seriously hurt?" asked the chief, excitedly.

"I don't know. He ran too fast for me to find out, for your men always run when they have to face the Pony Patrol."

"Bah!"

"I'll wager those with you here will skip as soon as they see the pony riders come in sight."

Morell spoke in a tone that all might hear, and the anxious looks cast back on the trail showed that the outlaws were by no means desirous of meeting the pony riders when the latter went on the warpath, as at times they were forced to do, to hit back when the road-agents became too bold in their attacks.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OUTLAW'S REPORT.

"See here, Monk Morell," and the chief of the Outlaw Pony Police spoke in deadly earnest; "I know a boy came through on this run; I want him—must have him."

"Well?" coolly said the driver.

"I also know that a package worth a large sum also came through."

"Yes."

"The boy and the package should be on this coach."

"They are not, as I've told you."

"I can see that the boy is not; but the package I will search for."

"Which would you rather have—the boy or the package?"

"The boy, a dozen times over," cried Goldgrip, excitedly.

"Well, he has escaped you, and the booty, too."

"We'll see about that," said menacingly.

"Well, take your look after the package, for I wish to go on. You can have that dead pard of yours, gratis, for I get nothing for hauling dead men."

"Carry him to the end of your run. Let them bury him there."

"Is that the way you treat your comrades?"

"Dead, he is no use to me."

"Well, make your search quick, as the Pony Patrol may be along at any moment."

"Did they go back when they took the boy and the booty, if they did take it," the outlaw asked.

"Don't you fool yourself about what the Pony Patrol did or did not do? I am giving you fair warning now, Goldgrip."

"You do not scare me, Monk Morell," was the retort; but, it was observable that Goldgrip and his men were anxious as to the whereabouts of the supposed Pony Patrol.

"See here! I have neither the package nor the boy with me, and both are safe, so why bother me longer? Let me go on my way."

The outlaw proceeded to search the coach, but found nothing save the mail and some miner's traps going through.

There was nothing of value inside or outside of the coach.

"Go on, Morell, but, mark my words, we will get that boy yet—yes, and that value package, too."

The driver laughed, called to his horses, and drove on, the outlaws watching him in silence.

Hardly had the coach disappeared when there was heard the rapid clatter of hoofs coming along the trail.

"Look out, men! The Pony Patrol are coming!" warned Goldgrip.

But, as only three horses dashed into sight, the Outlaw Police stood their ground.

"Our own men!" cried Goldgrip, and a moment after, up galloped three horsemen, whose faces were masked.

Their ponies showed hard riding, and one of the three called out:

"Captain Goldgrip, we rode hard to get here ahead of the coach."

"Well?"

"We held it up, sir, and the boy was aboard; but Buffalo Bill came up, shot Allen Long, and wounded Officer Burt, and—"

"You all took to your heels."

"We thought the Pony Patrol was upon us in force, sir."

"How many were they?"

"Only Buffalo Bill, sir, and—"

"Did five men run from one man?"

"You know he killed Long, sir, wounded Officer Burt, and we thought there were more."

"But he was alone?"

"Yes, sir; that we found out afterward."

"Cowards!"

"But, it was Buffalo Bill, sir!"

"Well, that does make some difference, for I suppose he made you believe he had a dozen Pony Riders with him."

"He did that; and he pursued us, but we saw that he was alone."

"Why did you not go back, then, and fight him?"

"We were scattered, sir, in flight, and only got together half an hour after. My horse ran into a canyon that I could not get out of, and I saw Buffalo Bill take the boy and some baggage, and go off with it, while the coach drove on."

"Did he have other horses with him?"

"Two pack animals, sir."

"Did he go back to Slade's Ranch?"

"No, sir; he started as though to come out on the Overland Trail, but flanking it."

"By Heaven, that is what he has done!"

"I rode with all speed to find Officer Burt, sir, and he sent us three on to you, while he went to the retreat, for he was wounded in both arms, sir, once by Buffalo Bill and the second time by that boy."

"Then the boy also fired at him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Men, we must catch Buffalo Bill before he gets to the stage camps at the end of Slade's Line. He will ride slow, doubtless, and we must not let him escape us," and Goldgrip dashed away with his men directly on the trail.

Half an hour after Monk Morell was surprised to see them coming up at a run behind him.

CHAPTER XVI.

CORRALLED.

"The game is lost!" cried Morell, as he saw the reappearance of the outlaws.

A second glance revealed three more riders than when they halted him.

"I understand; the others came up and told which way the boy and the booty went."

"So Goldgrip is riding to catch Buffalo Bill before he reaches the end of the run."

"But, they expect the Pony Patrol is out in force, so they will go slow, though I do feel anxious for Bill."

Up dashed Goldgrip, and called out:

"Some day, Morell, I'll have to kill you."

"What for?"

"You didn't say that that wild devil Buffalo Bill did that bit of neat work alone."

"Did he?"

"You know he did."

"Going to head him off?"

"Yes, of course."

"You won't do it."

"Why won't we?"

"You cannot. He's too clever for you and your gang."

"Oh, we'll see about that!" and the leader followed on after his men, who had not paused as they passed the coach.

"Now I do fear," mused Monk Morell, "that Buffalo Bill will not expect this and so get caught. I'll crowd the teams and see how it comes out."

"If the boy and the booty had stayed with the coach they would have been taken, and Bill has done his best, if he loses them."

The team was kept at a good pace, until at last the cabins of the next stage and pony camp came in sight, located in a valley.

It was the end of Alf Slade's run.

Up dashed the coach, ahead of time, for he had more than made up the time of his hold-ups.

The station men were surprised to hear his stage horn, and gathered quickly, to learn the cause of his arriving so much ahead of time.

"Well, Monk, anything gone wrong?" asked Gail Gordon, chief of the next division of road.

Taking the boss aside, Monk Morell asked, quickly:

"Is Buffalo Bill here?"

"No, indeed! It is not his run."

"I know that, boss; but, he is off duty and on a special service. I'll tell you about it."

This Monk Morell did, Gordon listening attentively, and asking questions here and there.

"Did you come upon the road-agents after they passed you on the trail, Monk?"

"No, for they had branched from the trail to head Buffalo Bill off somewhere."

"They'll not find him easy game; but, I will mount a couple of dozen men and go out to help him."

"I'm with you, boss."

"But, man, you have driven the double run!"

"That's nothing for me. Count on me when Buffalo Bill needs help!"

Gail Gordon gave the orders for a score of men to arm, mount their best horses, and be ready for a hard ride.

Then he read Alf Slade's letter to him, and said:

"I do hope we have not lost both the boy and the value package. It will be too bad, but both you and Cody have done all in your power to save them."

"Bill is not captured yet, or I'm mistaken, Boss Gordon," intimated Morell.

"I sincerely hope not; he's a hard one to corral. But, the boys are ready, so we'll be off."

The boss and Monk mounted; the men, a dashing lot of fellows, fell in behind with a cheer.

Gordon then explained:

"We are going to find the Outlaw Pony Police, boys—to help save Buffalo Bill from them!"

Leaving the Overland Trail, Boss Gordon took the direction most likely to meet Buffalo Bill, and had ridden several miles when Monk Morell called out:

"I hear firing!"

All listened attentively, and firing at a distance was distinctly heard.

"They've got Cody corralled!" cried Monk, and the whole party put their horses at full speed for the rescue.

About a mile away they came upon Buffalo Bill at bay!

By his side was the mysterious boy passenger!

Two of their horses were dead, but they held a position at a bend of the trail, where it rounded a cliff, so could hold the place until the outlaws flanked it, and this would take an hour or more.

"You mount my horse, take this bag, and your luggage, and follow this trail into Gordon's camp, ten miles from here. I will hold this position until you are a couple of miles away, and then I can escape on foot easily."

Buffalo Bill had just given this order to the brave boy, when up dashed Monk Morell and the others, and the Outlaw Pony Police started in full flight for their lives.

Buffalo Bill had again saved the boy and the booty!

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLOSE CALL.

Buffalo Bill had anticipated just what had happened. He had felt assured Morell would be held up by the main force of the outlaws, and that, when it was discovered the boy and the booty had escaped them, Captain Goldgrip would endeavor to head them off before they reached Gordon's station.

Consequently, he determined to make no wider detour than was necessary, and by hard riding hoped to get to the end of the run before the outlaws could head him off.

As he rode along with the strange boy he became more and more interested in him.

He knew that the youth had some secret which he would not or could not reveal.

It seemed so strange for a lad to be booked through on the Overland merely to a certain point, and then to leave the stage at his own will.

Why, too, were the outlaws anxious to catch this youngster? What was he to them? How had they been made aware of his coming?

Buffalo Bill could understand that when value-packages were reported as coming through, the fact would be found out by spies; but he did not understand why the coming of this boy had been reported and the great anxiety of the Outlaw Pony Police to capture him.

Wishing to learn more, as he rode along with the lad by his side, he said:

"You are a Texan, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do there?"

"Lived on a ranch, studied under a tutor, hunted game, Indians, and Mexican raiders, sir."

"Then you know something of wild life?"

"Yes, sir. a good deal for a boy of my years."

"Are your parents in Texas?"

"My mother is."

"Then your father is dead?"

"I don't know, sir."

"This is a long way for you to come alone?"

"I don't mind it, sir."

"You are not going on through?"

"No, sir."

"Where are you going to stop?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Have you come out here for a pleasure trip?"

"No, sir."

"Going to try and get work?"

"No, sir."

"Will you remain long?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Have you any friends out here?"

"I don't know, sir."

Buffalo Bill gave up in despair. He knew the boy would tell no more, and so said:

"I do not care to pry into your affairs, young pard; but it is rather remarkable to see a lad of your years come out to this wild region alone, and nothing be known about him, so I have asked more questions than I should, but I assure you it has been from interest, rather than curiosity."

"I wish to say, however, that if you need a friend out here, come to me, and I will be your pard."

"I thank you, sir," and the boy held out his hand, adding slowly:

"Perhaps some day I may take you at your word."

"Do so, and you will find I mean what I say."

The pony rider said no more, and they pushed on their way, mile after mile.

Presently the Trail Pilot halted, listened, and said:

"I hear horses crossing the stream over yonder, in those woods. It must be the outlaws, trying to head us off, so we must ride for it."

Ten minutes later Buffalo Bill saw Goldgrip and his men come out in the trail a mile behind them.

The outlaws caught sight of them, and a hot chase began.

Tired, as were Buffalo Bill's horses, the two pack animals began to drop back.

His own horse could have distanced the pursuers, but he remained with the others.

A volley from the Outlaw Police killed the horse ridden by the boy.

Instantly he leaped upon the other, and Buffalo Bill secured the valuable carpet-bag.

Soon after another shot brought down the other pack horse.

"Mount behind me, my boy! Now we will run for it," and, with the boy and the value-package, Buffalo Bill dashed ahead.

But, the weight and the pace were too much, even for his splendid horse, and at the bend in the trail, half way up the ridge, the pony rider turned at bay.

It was then he arranged for the flight of the boy on his horse, carrying the booty, while he held the road-agents in check, to insure the lad's escape.

Of course, he took big chances of escaping himself, but that was his way.

Just then the cry of Monk Morell was heard, and the Overland men came on the run to the rescue.

The boy and the value-package had not been captured on Alf Slade's division; so Buffalo Bill and Monk Morell were happy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WARNING DEFIED.

The outlaws' chase of Buffalo Bill was quickly turned into a flight for life on their part.

Gail Gordon sent his men in pursuit, and a hot, running fight was the result, in which Buffalo Bill and Harry Harman, the "Mysterious Kid," as Monk Morell called him, also joined.

The result was that a couple of the outlaws were dropped from their saddles, and their bodies were carried back to the station, as night was coming on and that would put an end to the pursuit.

Upon the arrival of the party at Gordon's camp, it was found that the stage which went out on the arrival of the one from the eastward had started on time, so that Harry Harman, who said that he was going still further westward, had

to wait in the camps until the next departure, which would be in three days.

The bag of valuables would also have to go out on the same coach, but Gail Gordon expected no further danger, either to it or to the youth.

Monk Morell was to start on his return the next afternoon, when the westward coach came in, and Buffalo Bill was to accompany him, as it was now known in Gordon's camp that he had been the special detail to guard the coach coming in.

Harry Harman clung close to the pony rider and driver until the time of their departure, and bade them good-by with regret:

"I won't forget what you told me, Mr. Cody," he said.

"Don't! I will be ready if ever you need my aid," replied Buffalo Bill.

"I wish to ask you, sir, a question."

"Certainly."

"Do you know the Pink Cliffs?"

"Yes, very well."

"Where are they?"

"Twenty miles westward of this station."

"What are they?"

"A ridge of stone cliffs, pink in color."

"No one there?"

"No, indeed; but the first relay out of here is five miles this side."

"Is there a canyon there?"

"Yes; it breaks into the Pink Cliffs about their centre."

"You seem to know them well, sir."

"I rode Pony Express on the run from here westward before I did on Alf Slade's present division, and the outlaws kept me flanking the trail all the time. But, little pard, what do you know about the Pink Cliffs?"

"I had heard of them, sir," was the evasive reply, and he added: "I thought they were on Alf Slade's line."

"They were once, for he then had the whole line; but, it was too much for one division."

Buffalo Bill wished to question the lad further, but Harry turned away to tell Monk Morell good-by, as the driver was mounting his box.

Buffalo Bill sprang upon the box with Monk, left his well-trained horse to follow, and, with a wave of good-by to the youth, the driver and pony rider were off on their return east.

At the spot where the first hold-up had occurred the coach arrived at sunset, and Morell drew rein, for, right in the centre of the trail, was a rude gallows!

Upon this was stuck a slip of paper, and, dismounting from the coach, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Listen to this, Monk!"

"Fire away!"

It was a warning, written in red ink, and above it, very cleverly sketched, were a skull and crossbones, and beneath a grave, the headboard of which bore the words:

"In Memory

"of

"BUFFALO BILL CODY,

"Pony Rider of the Overland Trail."

"Hanged by the Pony Police."

Then followed, Buffalo Bill reading it aloud:

"WARNING!

"WILLIAM F. CODY, BUFFALO BILL,

"Is hereby warned that he shall not again ride the Overland Trail, under

"PENALTY OF DEATH.

"If he disobeys this warning, he will be captured and hanged for the crime of

"DOING HIS DUTY,

which duty has prevented the Free Lances of the Overland from getting that for which they have sacrificed honor and risked life.

"By order of

"THE PONY POLICE,

"Overland Trail."

"They have gotten it up in style, Bill."

"Yes; proper as a card to a funeral."

"You don't look very badly scared."

"No. But they mean business, Monk."

"Business they can get you—yes."

"That is just it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall leave the gallows standing, and keep their warning as a souvenir; but it is polite to answer a communication, so I will do so."

Taking a pencil and leaf from his scratch book, Buffalo Bill wrote:

"The warning of the Pony Police read and considered. I shall not be driven off the Overland Trail."

"W. F. CODY—BUFFALO BILL,

"Pony Rider,

"Overland Trail."

This defiance stuck upon the gallows, the coach rolled on its way.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTURED.

Riding on the box with Monk Morell, his horse keeping close behind the coach, Buffalo Bill's eyes and ears were on the alert for any danger that might bar the trail back to Slade's Ranch.

"It was a pity, Monk, that Gail Gordon did not get in the rear of the outlaws, when they had me corralled, and so catch them in a trap," the pony rider observed.

"Yes, but we were so fearful you might go under that we pushed right ahead. To save you was the first thing. But, they got a setback, at least, and their warning to you shows how mad they are."

"Yes, they are in no good humor at the loss of the boy and the booty, and I only hope they will not still try to get both."

"By striking somewhere on Gordon's line?"

"Yes. I put the boss on his guard, and warned the drivers and pony riders that they might catch it; but, they are impatient of any interference, so I did not care to say too much."

"No, but we did our work all right on Slade's line, or, rather, you did, Cody."

"Your coach went through, Monk, and with you on the box, so don't detract from your share of the honor."

"You are always modest, Bill, in asserting your own claims; but, tell me, have you discovered anything more about that boy?"

"Only that he knows how to keep his secret, whatever it is, and is a youth who has seen a great deal, while he don't scare a little bit."

"He is a remarkable boy. I was in hopes that he might tell you more about himself."

"Only that he was reared on a ranch in Texas, where his mother now is, and that he did not know whether his father was dead or alive."

"He asked me about the Pink Cliffs, and several other questions which

showed he had heard something about this part of the country. My idea is that it is at the cliffs he intends to leave the trail."

"Well, Gail Gordon will know from the driver westward from his camp, and send word to Chief Slade, so we shall hear."

"Doubtless; and I only hope we will not hear of his capture," replied Buffalo Bill.

Thus the two friends talked on through the night, and in good time the coach rolled up to the cabin quarters at Slade's Ranch.

Alf greeted them in his usual way, but was surprised to see Buffalo Bill come back upon the coach.

He was not long in learning the whole story, however, told by both the pony rider and Morell, and was glad to feel that the youth and the value-package had arrived at Gail Gordon's camp in safety.

"That frees us, and I hope Gordon will meet with the same good luck."

"But, then, he has not Buffalo Bill and Monk Morell to help him out, and I must tell you both how I appreciate the valuable services you have rendered."

"Boss Gordon has got good men, Mr. Slade, but they do not like to take advice from your people, as I saw when I gave them a hint that the Outlaw Police, I thought, had not given up their purpose of capturing the boy and the booty," Buffalo Bill remarked.

Going to their quarters, the pony rider and the driver both turned in to take the rest they so much needed.

For some reason which he kept to himself, Alf Slade did not send Buffalo Bill out in his next turn as pony rider, retaining him at his quarters.

Lute Ross was recovering from his wound, and Doc Norris told Buffalo Bill that the bullet had not broken the bones, merely splintering one.

The man had urged Slade to let him take his dead brother's place as clerk, but the boss had declined, saying there was little to be done, and Pony Bob would help him whenever aid was required.

Alf Slade had noted that Lute was greatly disappointed, for he had said that he would work for nothing, so badly did he feel that his brother had been treacherous to the man who had befriended him.

But, the Division Master was firm, and he smiled grimly at the look of intense disappointment plainly betrayed by Ross.

"Now you'll find out, sir, just who the spies were," Cody had said to him.

"Yes, Professor Jim was one, I now know well, and his brother was his ally.

"I am watching Lute Ross closely, and as soon as I can put my hand upon him I will do so," declared Slade, with decision.

"Don't delay too long, sir, for he is waiting to kill you only until he can arrange to step into your shoes; I feel assured of that, sir," and Buffalo Bill turned toward a horseman who just then came dashing up at full speed.

"It is a special pony rider from Gordon's camp, sir," he called out.

The pony rider drew rein, leaped from his saddle, and handed Alf Slade a letter.

Opening it, he glanced quickly over the contents, and asked:

"Do you know what this note says, my man?"

"Boss Gordon told me to push through at lightning speed, sir, and get here before Buffalo Bill went eastward on his ride, for this is his day. He wants him to see what can be done to get back the

boy and the value-package, for they are gone. That's about all I know, sir," answered the pony rider.

Turning to Buffalo Bill, Alf Slade said:

"The Outlaw Police got both the boy and the bag of valuables, Cody."

"They were captured near Pink Cliffs, and Gordon wishes me to send you to him at once."

"I am ready, sir, or will be in ten minutes," was the prompt reply.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DRIVER'S REPORT.

Buffalo Bill and Alf Slade were closeted together for half an hour after the arrival of the pony rider special from Gordon's camp.

The letter to Slade stated that Driver Benson's coach, carrying the mysterious youth and the value-package had been held up by Goldgrip and half a dozen of his Pony Police, right at the canyon entrance to the Pink Cliffs.

The boy had been taken, and the car-pet-bag of valuables also. Driver Benson had been wounded, and the outlaws, supposing him to be dead, had left him lying by his coach; but Benson had crawled up to his box and driven back to the camp, reporting what had happened.

Gail Gordon had then made the request that Alf Slade would send Buffalo Bill to him, as he believed, if the outlaws could be tracked, Cody was the one to do it.

"Now, Bill, I don't tell you to go, for we are not responsible, as it was Gordon's line that the robbery was done upon, and the kidnapping of the boy also."

"But if you wish to go and help them out, I am willing, for I believe you are the only man who can be of service, and more, if you can recover the boy and the booty, it will be a great thing for the Overland Company, and you will not be forgotten."

"I rather like the idea of trying to track those fellows down, so will go, sir, at once."

"Fit yourself out well, and start when you please."

"I will not write Gordon, but your going will satisfy him, and you can tell him how I feel about his misfortune."

"I will, sir."

"But as those fellows got the boy, after all we did to prevent, I am determined to turn the tables upon them, if it can be done."

"There is no time limit to my stay, I hope, sir."

"None."

"Take your own time, and you are your own master."

In company with the Pony Rider Messenger, Buffalo Bill started for Gordon's camp, arriving there just twenty hours after the hold-up of Driver Benson's coach.

He was warmly welcomed by Gail Gordon, who said:

"Buffalo Bill, I should have taken your advice."

"I did not, and you know the result, so I humble my pride by asking you to do what you can for me to recover that bag of valuables and the boy."

"I will, Mr. Gordon."

"But is Benson much hurt?"

"He has two wounds, one in the side and another in the head."

"Both looked fatal to the outlaws, but Benson played possum on them, and so escaped with his life."

"He can talk?"

"Oh, yes."

"I will go and see him."

Driver Benson was found in his cabin, wounded, but not as seriously as he had feared.

"Say, pard, if it will not worry you, I would like to hear what you have to tell about your hold-up."

"I'll tell you just what happened, Pard Bill, and I thought of you when they bounced me, and how you had told me I'd better let the boy and the money go through on horseback and flank the trail."

"They struck you at the Pink Cliffs?"

"Yes, the boy was talking with me, as we drove along, when all of a sudden came a cry to halt."

"I didn't see any one, so took the chances of bolting by, but then came a half dozen shots, and I fell off the box."

"The boy grasped the reins, for I was playing possum as I lay on the ground, fearing they would shoot me again, and what they had given me hurt, I can tell you."

"Did the boy check the team?"

"Yes."

"He put the brake on, reined up, and called out to know what was wanted."

"He was plucky."

"You bet he was."

"They don't make no pluckier kids."

"And then?"

"Out rode Goldgrip and half a dozen of his Pony Police, called to the boy to come down off the box, all covering him with their rifles."

"He obeyed?"

"There was nothing else for him to do, Pard Bill."

"They had a led horse for him, and the leader searched the coach and got that bag of deviltry they call gold, and off they went, leaving me lying in the trail."

"They believed you dead?"

"You bet, they did, and I helped them to think so, for I was doing mighty little breathing while they were there."

"They appeared in a hurry?"

"Indeed, yes."

"They seemed to fear the Pony Riders' Patrol coming upon them."

"Which way did they go?"

"Up the Pink Cliffs Canyon, and at a run."

"Were they masked?"

"All of them."

"Well, Pard Benson, I will see what can be done, though it looks like a gone boy and booty."

"You bet, and, Pard Bill, let me say right here, the boy looked as though it was just what he wanted, to be captured."

"Do you mean it?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"I do."

"Why so?"

"Well, he seemed anxious to go."

"Remember, he thought I was dead."

"Yes."

"And he just got off that box, mounted the led horse, and rode off with the chief same as if he wanted to go."

"You surprise me, Benson; but do not speak of this to any one."

"I have not done so; but that boy was talking about the Pink Cliffs, and asking all kinds of questions about them, and I was the only one fired at, or the boy would have been hit, too."

"It looks strange, Pard Bill."

"Very," was the response of Buffalo Bill, and he was evidently puzzled.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRAY VISITOR.

"I prefer to go alone, sir, and take my own way and time, so if I am gone longer than you think I should, do not

be anxious, for I am going to run down that gang."

So said Buffalo Bill to Gail Gordon, and so the next stage back to Slade's Ranch carried a letter to Chief Slade, telling the full situation and just what he, Pony Rider Cody, intended to do.

"Do just as you please, Cody, for I will not interfere," was Gail Gordon's response.

It was night when Buffalo Bill left the camp, and he was supposed to start on his return to Slade's Ranch.

Instead, he rode a mile on the trail, then found a pony rider waiting for him with a pack animal most liberally supplied with provisions and a camp outfit.

Securing the horse, Buffalo Bill took a trail to the left, flanking the camps, and held on for several hours, when he went into camp.

He was up at dawn, had breakfast, and, mounting, rode directly to the canyon at the Pink Cliffs.

The scene of the hold-up was looked over carefully, and then the tracks of the outlaws' horses leading from there.

Buffalo Bill counted the tracks of eight horses.

"Benson said that Goldgrip had six men with him, and there was a led horse for the boy, so that accounts for the eight tracks," said Buffalo Bill.

Through the Pink Cliffs Canyon the trail led, and the pony rider saw that Goldgrip had been riding rapidly.

After several miles the canyon entered a large valley, and here every track but two went in a separate way.

They branched off in every direction.

Staking out his pack horse, Buffalo Bill rode his other animal, and followed the tracks leading to the right.

They were of two horses, the only trail that had more than the tracks of one horse.

"Goldgrip and the boy account for them," muttered Buffalo Bill.

He followed them several miles, and lost them where they entered a stream.

Back to the starting point he went, and then took the next track.

This one also he followed to the stream.

Then two others were followed, and night was at hand.

Camping for the night, he was up at dawn, and once more began to follow the trails.

It was evening when he had followed the last one to where it also entered the stream, but did not reappear, the same as the others.

Again he camped until the next day, and then started down the stream.

He went many miles, but no tracks had come out on that side.

Crossing, he went back up the bank and reached the point opposite his camp the night before, and just at sunset.

Again he camped. He was as untiring as a hound, as patient as an Indian, as determined as Death.

With the dawn he followed up the stream.

For miles he went, and at last came to where the bank was stony, and no trail would have been visible there.

Back on the other side he went.

But no track of where the outlaws had left the water could be found.

The pony rider knew that they had left it at the stony soil, and as there was a valley there, covered with lava, no track could be seen.

The outlaws had most surely covered up their trail.

But not discouraged, Buffalo Bill went into camp for the night.

When he awoke in the morning, he was surprised to find a strange horse feeding near his two.

At once he went toward the animal.

The bridle reins were broken off close to the bit, the stake rope was dragging, and the end was worn off, showing that it had dragged many a mile.

The horse allowed himself to be caught without difficulty, and when he had taken off the saddle, Buffalo Bill began to muse.

"That is an old and well-used saddle.

"It does not belong to an outlaw, for they do not use a Texas saddle or bridle, and these are of Texan make.

"The blanket beneath the saddle is an old Mexican serape.

"Where is the rider, I wonder?

"I will see if the horse can find him."

After having his breakfast, Buffalo Bill put his own saddle and bridle upon the stray horse, and, mounting, gave the animal the rein.

He started off without hesitation, went along at a brisk walk, and, reaching the head of the valley, turned toward the mountains.

"Ho, is that so?"

"You live up that way, do you?"

"Well, I'll let you go, for perhaps if you cannot talk you can tell some secret by your actions."

"I'll follow your lead, good horse."

And all through the day Buffalo Bill allowed the stray horse to have free rein, to act as guide.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE GUIDE.

When night came on Buffalo Bill found a good camping place.

The stray horse led him to it.

There were signs there that others had found the same place to camp, and not very long before.

The ashes of their campfire were yet fresh, and there were tracks about of five unshod horses.

The Horse Guide was also unshod, and his hoofs had surely made one of the tracks about the camp.

Who were those that had camped there and where were they, the pony rider wondered.

He was sure that they were not outlaws.

No tracks had been revealed that day in the hard soil traveled over, but the horses had gone on unhesitatingly and as though he had a definite destination in view.

He would doubtless travel in the same way upon the morrow.

But it was a dangerous country to go into, Buffalo Bill well knew.

There was no camp or settlement in that direction that he had ever heard of, and Indians were the only ones the pony rider expected to come upon, unless the horse led him to some place where white men dwelt.

Could it be that some one of the missing parties that had invaded that country and never been heard of did dwell there?

Then where was the rider of that stray horse?

Had he gone to the Overland Trail, caught a coach, and turned the animal loose?

There were others with him, for there were the tracks of five unshod horses about.

"I will give the horse his way, come what will," said Buffalo Bill.

He staked out the horses, built a fire, cooked supper, and turned in.

Nothing disturbed his slumbers until

dawn, when a deer came curiously up to camp, and furnished the pony rider with some good steaks.

Again mounting the stray horse, as before, Buffalo Bill gave him his rein, and away he went at the same swinging walk.

The pony rider was in a quandary.

But he would see the matter through.

He had lost the trail of the outlaws, and what had become of the boy and the value-package he could only guess.

Fate seemed to have led him to take that way, and he would go to the end of the trail.

The country grew wild in the extreme as he advanced, but the horse never swerved, and kept on as though he knew just where he was going.

Toward noon Buffalo Bill entered the mountains, the horse turned up a valley, and half an hour after, to the surprise of the pony rider, a cabin appeared in sight.

Buffalo Bill halted and gazed about him.

He was in a beautiful valley, near its head, and there was the cabin, half a mile from him.

It stood at the head of the valley, upon a rise.

Riding on, and prepared to meet friend or foe, Buffalo Bill advanced to the cabin.

The door and shutters were closed.

It was a strangely comfortable place to find in that wild land.

Built of hewn logs, the cabin was one of two large rooms, and had a shed piazza running across the front.

Boarding had been split out of logs, in place of being sawed, and altogether the cabin was as good a one as Slade's Ranch could boast of having.

The horse stopped before the door, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Hello!"

But he called in vain.

No answer was returned.

Dismounting, he knocked at the door.

There was no response.

One fact impressed him, and that was the number of coyotes hovering about the place.

The door did not yield to his push.

It was bolted within.

With some difficulty one of the closed shutters was removed.

It was an outer one, for an inner one still blocked the view.

This was forced in, and the pony rider started back at the overwhelming odor that greeted him.

"The owner of this cabin is dead," he cried, and he sprang into the window he had opened and quickly unbolting the door, threw it open.

The light streamed in and revealed a strange and startling sight.

Two men lay dead upon the floor, clasped in each other's arms, and each held a knife in his right hand, that was buried to the hilt in the body of the other.

They were bearded, long-haired, rough-looking men, clad in worn miners' garb, and they had evidently been dead for days.

The bolted cabin showed that they had killed each other.

The cause was upon a table in the cabin, while an open trap in the floor revealed that it had been a fight for gold.

Upon the table, upon the floor, and in the open trap was gold scattered about in quantities, just as it had been mined.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS CABIN.

Buffalo Bill was astounded at what he beheld.

He quickly went outside into the fresh air, and there stood musing.

The horse had led him upon a fearful secret.

But there was yet much to discover. Here was a cabin of gold miners.

Two of them lay dead, with closed doors, and had killed each other.

There were certainly others that had been there and gone, for that stray horse had been ridden from the cabin by some one.

The mystery was to be solved.

But first, the dead were to be buried. Picks and shovels were found, and a grave was soon dug not far off.

The two bodies, grasped in a death clutch, could not be torn apart, so they were rolled in a blanket, and thus buried.

The door and windows were left wide open, a large fire built in each room of the cabin, to thoroughly air it, and Buffalo Bill slept out of doors.

There was fine grazing for the horses near by, a stream ran near the cabin, and there was every evidence of comfort, and that the miners had been there for several years.

Investigating the cabin and surroundings the next morning, Buffalo Bill found indications that at least five men had dwelt there.

This was evident in many ways, and the trap in the floor of the cabin revealed five separate bags of gold, in particles of smallest size to nuggets the size of a pigeon egg.

The miners had evidently been engaged in placer mining, though some little had been dug, as it showed.

Calculating the amount, Buffalo Bill concluded that there must be a good fortune for one man, but small ones, if divided among five men.

"This has caused the trouble, I guess.

"One or two men wanted it all."

Provisions were at a low ebb, and this caused Buffalo Bill to believe that the men who had gone to the Overland Trail had started after supplies.

From finding the strange horse as he had, Buffalo Bill came to the conclusion that the men who had left the cabin had come to grief.

"If all did not fall by the wayside, they will come back here without fail, so here I shall remain on watch.

"These two dead men evidently meant to skip off with the gold, or one did, they quarreled, and killed each other.

"That is the way I read the signs here," said the pony rider.

"Whoever left here, if not dead, will return, so my duty is plain, though I do not like giving up the trail I started out upon.

"Now I think of it, I believe that the boy is in some way connected with this outfit.

"The trail led straight to the Pink Cliffs Canyon.

"That is where he was interested, certainly, and where, I was sure, he meant to leave the coach.

"Three men are missing from this cabin, as I make it out, and they must have gone there to meet the boy.

"It seems so to me, the more I think it over.

"But the outlaws were there, and they got the boy.

"Could they have met the men from here, had a fight with them, and killed them?

"That stray horse would indicate that they did.

"If so, will not the outlaws come on the hunt for this cabin, to get the gold?

"If they know of it, by meeting the miners, it is my belief that they will.

"Yes, come who may, I shall remain here and see what turns up.

"I shall keep my lonely vigil and take the consequences."

Thus deciding, Buffalo Bill determined to make himself at home.

There was a small corral where the horses could be kept at night, and here he decided to place them, letting them feed by day.

The nights were cool, so he took possession of the cabin.

But, outside of this, he knew that it would be a good fort, in case of attack, in fact, he called it "Fort Death."

His own provisions he knew would last him for a month, and there were enough found in the cabin to supply him for two weeks more.

This caused him to feel that the two dead men had had no fear of starving to death, as some one had doubtless gone after provisions before the winter set in, it being then September.

All things considered, Buffalo Bill decided to remain.

The cabin was comfortable, some one of its occupants had manufactured several easy chairs, a hammock made of rope hung out on the piazza, and there were old magazines and books found on a shelf to entertain him.

He had found a spy glass in the cabin, and spent a great deal of his time in surveying the valley through it.

Game was plentiful, wood close at hand, and so the pony rider's lone vigil began.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A QUEER CUSTOMER.

Days passed away, and the lone vigil still continued.

Buffalo Bill found time hung heavy upon his hands, yet he still had abiding faith in the return of some one to the lone cabin.

At times he thought he would bury the gold and return, for he felt anxious about the fate of Harry Harman, and to see if the Pony Police could not be tracked to their doom.

One day, on the last day of the third week of his stay, he was seated on the little piazza, spy glass in hand, when his eyes suddenly fell upon a visitor approaching.

Leveling his spy glass, he saw that it was a man in black, mounted upon a white horse.

As he drew nearer, to his surprise he discovered that the horseman was certainly out of place in that country.

He would not have been surprised to see such a horseman in the country in the East, but out in the Wild West, he certainly looked out of place.

The horse was a splendid animal, and was well bridled and saddled, but not with the equipments seen on the border.

The man was dressed in black from head to foot, wore a white cravat, and his coat had a clerical cut, while his head was covered with a white stovepipe hat, encircled by a wide band of crepe.

The clothes, hat, and shoes were all much worn, and to add to his strange appearance, the man wore black gloves, and in one hand carried a Prayer Book.

If he was armed he did not reveal the fact, and his face was not one to win with one who made the study of mankind a business.

Rising as the queer-looking individual came up to the cabin, Buffalo Bill cried, as he suddenly recalled his face:

"By Heaven, but you are the Dead Shot Parson!"

The man had the sleek mien of one

who made it a trade to deceive, but at the recognition of him by Buffalo Bill, his face turned pale, the smooth smile faded, and he dropped his reins, and his hand went toward his hip.

"Hold on, parson, or I'll send you climbing the golden stairs in a second!" and the pony rider had the man covered in a second.

"Why, you are my old friend, Buffalo Bill, the pony rider."

"Take your hand off of your hip!"

"It's off!"

"Clasp your hands in front of you, now."

"It is done."

"But, Pard Pony Rider, we are friends—"

"It is no such thing, for I could never tolerate you, as you know, and I had congratulated the camps upon having gotten rid of you."

"No, no, I—"

"What are you doing here?"

"I am doing my duty, as a saver of souls, and—"

"Quit that cant."

"Where do you live?"

"Wherever duty calls me."

"See here, parson, I don't trust you a little bit, and as you have walked into my trap, I shall hold you."

"Hands up!"

The man hesitated, then saw that the pony rider was not to be trifled with, and raised his hands above his head.

Taking his lariat off of the floor where it lay, Buffalo Bill threw the noose over the upraised arms, drew it taut, and soon had the man firmly secured.

"You will repent this, Buffalo Bill."

"I'll take all chances."

"I always felt that you were a fraud, and when you left the pony camps thought we had got rid of you cheap, though you did steal all the money the boys had."

"I tracked you then, but a rain saved you, for the boys intended to hang you."

"Now, don't pretend piety to me, for you are as great a scamp as lives, and simply wear the garb of a parson to serve the Devil the better."

He had tied his prisoner to one of the posts upholding the shed, and then began to search him.

The man resisted this savagely, but Buffalo Bill's giant strength conquered, and he soon had piled up on the floor a belt with three revolvers, a bowie knife, lariat, belt of gold, leather case containing papers, and numerous other things, several of which the pony rider gazed at curiously, one in particular, for it was a black mask.

Upon the saddle were a roll of blankets, bag of provisions, and another containing a small coffee pot, frying pan, tin cup, and plate and knife and fork.

Hanging to the pommel of the saddle was a rifle, and altogether the man was well supplied for an outing of days.

He wore another suit of clothes beneath his clerical garb, and when Buffalo Bill saw it he gave a loud whistle, the man turning still more livid in hue.

In the top of the high hat was a closely folded slouch, and when the pony rider had finished his search, he said, with a grim smile:

"You are a queer customer, parson; but, where I suspected you before, I know you now, as—one of the Pony Police."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECRET KNOWN.

Buffalo Bill seemed more than satisfied with his capture.

He had known the man as an itinerant parson in the camps.

He was wont to roam from camp to camp, and, with a wonderful flow of language, a superb voice, and a genial manner, he won his way with the boys.

Dressed in clerical garb, wearing a high hat and with a smooth-shaven face, he looked the preacher, if he was not one in reality.

But Buffalo Bill had never liked him, and was wont to say if he was not then a rascal he was a reformed one.

Once he had proposed a match with the parson, and the result was that the latter beat all the men in camp with revolver and rifle, save Buffalo Bill, who tied him.

"That man learned the use of weapons as soon as he learned to pray," the pony rider said.

The "Dead Shot Parson" was the name given the man after his success in the shooting match.

Buffalo Bill also saw that he was as strong as a giant, and rode a horse like a cowboy.

What his name was no one knew.

He was simply called "Parson."

But one morning the parson was missing, and then the boys began to miss their money and valuables.

Two of the best horses went with the parson, the stage office was broken into and robbed of some money, the supply store had been raided, and the man had left well prepared for flight and trouble.

He had watched his chance, too, and started just when a storm was threatening, so his tracks were soon destroyed.

But what had brought the parson to the lone cabin was what Buffalo Bill wished to know.

Was he one of the dwellers there returning home?

With him from the pony ranch Buffalo Bill had brought several pairs of steel manacles.

These he soon put on the wrists and ankles of his prisoner, and passing his lariat through them, confined him to a chair.

"Now, parson, we'll get better acquainted, for I will go over your outfit here," and the pony rider sat down to make a search of the articles found on the prisoner.

The buckskin belt of gold contained hundreds in twenty-dollar gold coins, and rings, earrings, breastpins, and studs with diamonds in them.

There were valuable watches, bracelets, and other jewelry, and Buffalo Bill said:

"This is a perfect pawnshop you carry—ah! here is a ring or two I recognize as having belonged to some of the riders."

The man said nothing, but looked daggers at his captor, while he wore an anxious expression as well.

Opening a leather case, there was found thousands of dollars in paper money and a bundle of papers.

One paper and several letters the scout gazed at with deepest interest.

One was a map, neatly drawn, and beneath it was written a number of lines of instructions.

"By Jove, but this is a find, parson."

"It is a map of the Overland Trail between Slade's Ranch and Gordon's Camp, and a place marked on it with the words:

"Leave the coach here unless you find a letter for you at Slade's Ranch giving you instructions to go on to Pink Cliffs Canyon, and in that case remain there in the camping place marked until my arrival."

"Parson, you got this from the Mysterious Boy of the Overland, whom you

kidnapped from Benson's coach, for I believe you are none other than Goldgrip, the Chief of the Outlaw Pony Police."

"It is a lie!" shouted the prisoner.

"Your denial is proof that I am right."

"Yes, your figure and all, with the mask, and the uniform under your clerical garb, convinces me that you are Goldgrip."

"You kidnapped that boy, as these papers prove, for here is a letter addressed to him to a Texas Post Office, and another to Slade's Ranch."

"I shall read them."

This Buffalo Bill did, and then he said:

"I see it all now."

"It is as clear as noonday."

"The man who came here was a gold hunter."

"He lived in Texas, and left there on account of financial difficulties that led him into a quarrel, in which he killed a man who had ruined him."

"His wife and son remained upon the ranch, and they were allowed to do as best they could."

"All sympathized with the fugitive, and the witness of the affray, when dying, confessed that the rancher had acted only in self-defense."

"So he was written to to return home by his faithful wife, but the letters never reached him, as you have them here."

"He wrote to his son to come here and join him, keeping all secret, as he might be followed, and sent him a map of the Overland Trail, and two stations, and where to leave it."

"A second letter to the boy, addressed to Slade's Station, told him to leave the coach at Pink Cliffs Canyon."

"This map and letters to the boy you have here, so took from him."

"The letter said that the boy should return home with gold to pay all debts."

"Now I understand the mystery about that boy, and I know that you, getting some of the letters, planned to capture that boy, find this cabin, and rob the Texan and his friends."

"I was on your trail, and hunting for the boy, and Fate led me here."

"I am in great luck so far; but I ask you where that Texan is and where is that boy?"

"I don't know," was the sullen response.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SURPRISE.

Buffalo Bill heard the denial of the prisoner with perfect calmness.

"All right, you must suffer the consequences of not knowing, parson."

"I can tell you nothing."

"See here, Goldgrip, I know that you kidnapped that boy, for I have seen Benson."

"He is dead."

"He is not, for you only wounded him, and he drove the coach back to Gordon's."

"You also got that bag of valuables, and it and the boy must be produced, or their fate known."

"I'll give up both for my freedom and to keep the valuables and money I have."

"No."

"I'll betray the band of Pony Police also."

"No."

"You don't value my life more than all?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You are Goldgrip."

"I am not."

"You are, for your uniform shows it, as I killed one of your men and saw his."

"I'll do as I say for my life."
 "No, I make no terms with you."
 "Then you'll never get the boy."
 "I'll find him or his grave."
 "You'll never get that bag of booty."
 "I may not, but I'll hang you."

"And the Pony Police will continue their lawless deeds and drive you from the trail, or kill you, for my death will not affect them."

"I don't believe that, for I know you are Goldgrip."

"As to killing me, that I will risk."

"But you came here, guided by that map, for Miner Harman made it, so the boy could find it should he miss him at the Overland Trail."

"You expected to find some one here, so played the preacher act."

"You found me."

"I shall make no terms with you, and I'll tell you now that I believe Miner Harman and others went to meet the boy, met you and your gang, and were either killed by you or captured."

"I shall hide the gold here, start with you at dawn to-morrow for camp, and then lead the Pony Riders' Patrol on the hunt for your gang, and to find out the fate of the boy and his father."

"One of the horses of those miners escaped, and I found him, so he led me here."

"I can find the fate of the others, never fear, so don't trouble yourself to lie any more, and spend your time in preparing to die, for the boys will hang you."

"Say, Buffalo Bill, if you will let me go, with the money I have, I'll tell you all."

"I will not," was the decided response.

Determined to keep his prisoner secure, yet make him as comfortable as he could, Buffalo Bill brought him into the cabin,

When he returned outside his eyes fell upon a form approaching the cabin.

Walking, and with a rifle over his shoulder, a pack on his back, the pedestrian came slowly along.

Seizing his spy glass, Buffalo Bill leveled it, and at once started to meet the visitor, calling out excitedly:

"That mysterious boy, as I live!"

"Why, you are Buffalo Bill, the Pony Rider?" said the boy.

"Yes, Harry Harman, I am, and more, I am out on your trail, for I heard of your capture and—"

"And kept your promise to help me?"

"Yes."

"But how did you get here?"

"Walked."

"You look it," and Buffalo Bill gazed with pity upon the haggard face of the boy.

"The Pony Police got me, as you know, and I played I wasn't sorry, for I wished to gain their confidence, and escaped.

"That Satan's Own, Captain Goldgrip, took me with him."

"And the carpet-bag?"

"He took that also, and buried it, and I know where, for he didn't seem to think I would live long, so let me see him plant it."

"Then he took me to his retreat, robbed me of all I had with me, and in that way learned the way here."

"When he got to his retreat Goldgrip found that his men had met three miners, those who were coming to meet me, and one of whom was my poor father."

"They had killed two of them, but one escaped, and Heaven only knows whether it was my father or not, but he was wounded, and the chances are he will die, or perish from starvation."

"After some time in camp, I managed to make my escape, and to get off with

my blankets and the weapons of the man I killed, and who was guarding me."

"My father had told me where to go to camp, and some provisions were cached there, and I had studied the map and instructions until I knew all by heart."

"So there I went, got my supplies, and started on foot for this cabin, where I felt I would find some one."

"And here I find you?"

"Yes, and I have my story to tell, Harry."

And Buffalo Bill told all, from his starting upon the trail from Gail Gordon's Camp, finding the stray horse that guided him to the cabin, and how the pretended parson had arrived, and whom he was sure was Goldgrip.

"I can tell, sir, mighty quick."

"But you surprise me about those two men, and I suppose they were fighting for the gold left here."

"Yes, that was it, one perhaps being honest and trying to protect it."

"But did you leave Goldgrip in camp?"

"Yes, and I suppose he put his whole gang on the search for me, and, not knowing I had supplies, thought I had perished of hunger and cold."

"You look half starved, so come, and I'll get dinner."

"The food wasn't very good, for it had gotten wet in the cache, and I do feel tired, for I am not used to walking, and it is a long, hard tramp."

"But if I only knew my father's fate, I would be content."

"We will find out," and Buffalo Bill led the way to the cabin.

"Here, Goldgrip, is your Boy Captive come to see you."

"Great God!"

It was all the man could say.

"It's Goldgrip, Mr. Cody," said the boy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ASSASSIN.

With the arrival of Harry Harman at the cabin, Buffalo Bill changed his mind about leaving the next day.

He spent several days there for the boy to recuperate after his severe tramp.

The prisoner fretted and fumed, but it did no good, and the pony rider and the youth quietly prepared for their long trail back.

The gold was all safely packed on one of the pack saddles, and such things in the cabin as the boy wished to take were also strapped on.

One of the saddles found there was given to Harry Harman, who was to ride the stray horse that had been Buffalo Bill's guide, and the prisoner was to ride his own.

All being ready, the start was made, the prisoner secured to his saddle, and Buffalo Bill led the way at a slow pace, for the pack horses were well laden.

As by branching off he could reach Alf Slade's Ranch by going very little further than to Gail Gordon's, Buffalo Bill headed for that point, timing himself so as to arrive in the night, as he did.

Then he put the prisoner quietly into his cabin, with all the traps, left the boy there to watch him, and went over to Alf Slade's quarters.

As he neared the cabin he saw a man standing at one side of the door. A moment more another appeared from the direction of the stage office.

As he did so the one in the shadow raised his arm but the trigger of the re-

volver he held was not pulled; Buffalo Bill was too quick for him, and the arm dropped, the bone shattered by the pony rider's bullet!

Another moment and the would-be assassin was in Buffalo Bill's grip, while Alf Slade rushed forward and said:

"He meant to kill me, and you saved me—ha! you are Buffalo Bill!"

The assassin was Lute Ross, and he was quickly sent under guard to the care of Doc Norris, while Alf Slade and Buffalo Bill went to the latter's cabin.

Half an hour after the alarm was sounded, and the crowd instantly collected, for they had just been hanging Ross.

"I expected it," said Slade, and then he explained that the men belonging to the Pony Riders' Patrol were to mount at once, and follow Buffalo Bill's lead, and were to go prepared for a ten days' trail.

Soon after Buffalo Bill, with Harry Harman by his side, rode away in the darkness. A dozen pony riders were at their back, prepared for any emergency.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

The Pony Riders' Patrol rendered a good account of themselves, for they returned to Slade's Ranch within a week, after a raid upon the retreat of the Pony Police.

They had several prisoners with them, could account for half a dozen more as dead, and had much captured booty and many fine horses.

What was best of all, there was found in camp Henry Harman, the Texan miner, who had been captured by two outlaws, as he was wandering about the country, trying to make his way to one of the Overland Stations.

The meeting of the father and his brave boy need not be dwelt upon.

The former told how his two comrades had been shot, how he had made his escape, but that the horse had broken away from him, leaving him afoot.

He had made his way to the cache camp, but found all gone, and so had been trying to reach Gail Gordon's when captured and taken to the outlaws' retreat.

His four fellow-miners he knew absolutely nothing about, not even their names, for those who had gone into the mining country with him had returned long before.

He had discovered the mine, the others had come to his cabin and been welcome, but claimed their share.

As they were now dead, Henry Harman was the sole owner.

He at once wished Buffalo Bill to share with him, but this the latter firmly refused to permit, and guided all back to Slade's Ranch.

There the pony riders and others, in spite of Alf Slade's protest, made short work of Goldgrip and his fellow-prisoners, and thus ended the career of the Outlaw Pony Police, through Buffalo Bill's good work.

Harry Harman and his father soon after took Monk Morell's stage eastward for their home in Texas, and in later years, when Buffalo Bill had won name and fame in the New World and the Old, he visited the Lone Star State, and there became the guest of Harman's Ranch, and received a welcome he could never forget.

THE END.

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